とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）6

鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 6

<< CONTENTS >>

- Illustrations
- Prologue: On the Front Side of the Stage
- Chapter 1: Opening Ceremony. Baby_Queen.
- Chapter 2: After School. Break_Time.
- Chapter 3: Closure. Battle_Cry.
- Chapter 4: Stop Sign. Beast_Body,_Human_Heart.
- Epilogue: On the Other Side of the Stage.
- Afterword
- Notes
- Credits

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鎌池和馬
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Toaru Majutsu no Index 6

The 1st day of the new school term in Academy City.

This would be the day when the "Mysterious Transfer Student" shows up at the school Kamijou Touma goes to; the day when Index makes a friend for the first time; the day when Misaka Mikoto meets Index for the first time; the usual misfortune for Kamijou who would be trapped between the two ladies; the day the usually-observing Shirai Kuroko gets jealous of Kamijou... And, the day when Academy City gets raided by a certain magician!

"Mysterious Transfer Student", "Friend", a certain magician.

Under Code Red at Academy city, the time when science and magic intersect, the story of Kamijou Touma shall begin...!

か-12-6

とある魔術の禁書目録(インデックス)⑥

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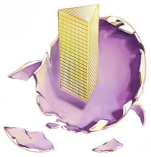
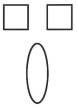




Kamachi Kazuma

Although this is the 6th volume, this series has only just broke through the summer holidays into the start of the new school term. Until now, how should I put it, the action in the school feels like the action during the summer holidays in this series. But with this, at last a normal school day depiction could be added in... I wonder if I could do this...?

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index
Toaru Majutsu no Index 2
Toaru Majutsu no Index 3
Toaru Majutsu no Index 4
Toaru Majutsu no Index 5
Toaru Majutsu no Index 6

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born in 1973. Had purchased a microwave oven as an afterthought, but lost the breaker almost immediately. Is it the time to look for a new place to live in...?

カバー／鵜田絹

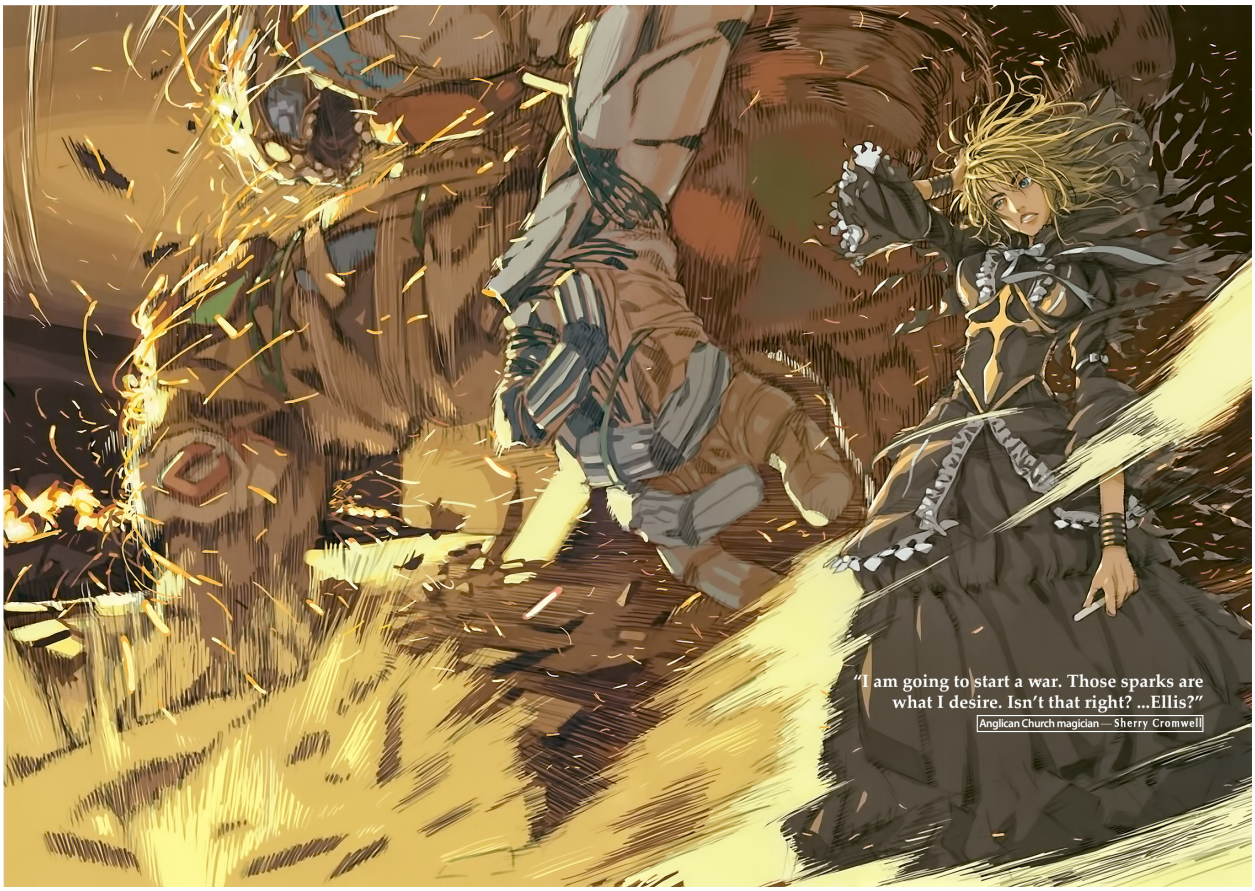
とある魔術の
禁書目録
インデックス
6
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

“H-hold on a moment. Komoe-sensei, what’s going on here...?”
High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma

"This must be the 'high-tech' sports-wear that Touma had talked about!"
Nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index
"...Umm."
Transfer student— Kazakiri Hyouka

"Ah, don't cry. Looks like you're going to cry a whole lot when it's the graduation ceremony."
Physical education teacher — Yomikawa Aiho
"C-crying is fine, isn't it!? Every single year these tears flow by themselves, so it can't be helped!"
Touma's homeroom teacher — Tsukuyomi Komoe

"...Oh dear. How bold to act like that at such a time!"
Mikoto's roommate — Shirai Kuroko
"Hey you, what reasons would you have for pushing a girl down in this sort of place?"
Student of Tokiwadai Middle School in Academy City — Misaka Mikoto


"I am going to start a war. Those sparks are what I desire. Isn't that right? ...Ellis?"
Anglican Church magician — Sherry Cromwell

contents

10 Prologue On the Front Side of the Stage

20 Chapter 1 Opening Ceremony Baby_Queen.

102 Chapter 2 After School Break_Time.

162 Chapter 3 Closure Battle_Cry.

238 Chapter 4 Stop Sign Beast_Body,Human_Heart.

318 Epilogue On the Other Side of the Stage

Prologue: On the Front Side of the Stage

There was a windowless building in Academy City.

There was no door, window, corridor or even a staircase, it didn’t even function like a building. There was no way to get inside except to use a Level 4 ‘teleport’ ability. There was a large glass cylinder in the middle of this sealed chamber.

The cylinder was 4m in diameter and 10m in length. It was made from strengthened glass, and there was red fluid inside it. There were mechanical installations all over the spacious room, as tens of thousands of cables and tubes were scattered all over the floor and attached to the cylinder in the center.

As there were no windows, this room was always in darkness, but there were many signals and screens on the mechanical installations surrounding the cylinder, glowing like a cluster of stars in the night.

In this cylinder that was filled with red fluid, there was a person in a green surgical gown floating upside-down.

The General Director of Academy City, the ‘human’ Aleister Crowley.

This person looked like a man, yet also a woman; like an adult, yet also a child; like a saint, yet also a criminal. By leaving all of his life functions to machines, that "human" had gained a lifespan calculated to reach 1700 years. His entire body, including his own brain, was now in a hibernating state, most of its thinking process was assisted by the machines around it.

(…It’s about time.)

The moment Aleister thought this, as if it were rehearsed, two human figures suddenly appeared in front of the cylinder. One was a petite esper with a teleport ability, and the other was a man who had been teleported in by the girl, and these two were holding hands.

The girl with the teleport ability didn’t say anything. She just nodded her head and again vanished into thin air.

The tall guy was the only one left in the darkness.

This tall guy had messy blond hair, and was wearing blue sunglasses to block his eyes. He was wearing a flower shirt and shorts; his appearance didn’t match the location.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu. The secret agent in charge of spying on the Anglican Church and Academy City.

“The security’s too loose, what are you planning now?”

As a spy, Tsuchimikado said this to his employer Aleister in an impatient tone. Though Tsuchimikado was a spy, he was not Aleister’s immediate subordinate.

Tsuchimikado’s tone was extremely crude and violent, and anyone who knew his normal personality would be shocked and terrified by it. Facing this Tsuchimikado’s who was not intending to hide the unhappiness in his heart, Aleister just said casually,

“No problems. I’m completely aware of the intruder's whereabouts. This is a perfect opportunity. Once I change the process slightly, I can do away with the plan’s 2082 to 3277—”

“Let me remind you first.”

Tsuchimikado interrupted Aleister. He slammed the report hard onto the glass cylinder. There was a photo attached to the report; it was a photo taken secretly, and the woman on it was the intruder.

She was over 25 years old, had blond hair and brown skin that was inherited from foreign blood, her hair was all messy, maybe due to the way it was maintained; it looked like a cheap wig for a play. If it was seen from the back, it would look like a full lion's mane. The pitch black clothing had frills all over the edges; it was completely of a gothic style. However, the fabric of the dress was tattered all over the place, and the lace was slightly yellowish. It seemed like the clothing wasn’t deliberately worn for the occasion, but was worn as a usual wear.

“Sherry Cromwell. This person isn’t some roaming magician, but one of the Anglican Church’s Necessarius. She’s not going to be easy to handle like Aureolus.”

Tsuchimikado seemed to be as impatient as an old smoker who was forced to quit smoking as he said,

“The Anglican Church is also an organization that was set up by humans, so they naturally have all sorts of people down there. No, in terms of the structure, among all of Christianity, there’s unlikely to be any national religion with a large divide that’s as complicated as the Anglican Church. I believe you should be aware of this.”

“People with similar beliefs fighting with each other, now that’s a great workplace.”

“Yeah.”

Tsuchimikado sighed, and said,

“However, because of that, there’re all sorts of sects and beliefs within the Anglican Church, and not all of them have a positive view on Academy City. Some of them even intend to make the entire world as England’s colony and set every flag in the world as England’s. I can’t tell how effective that ‘deal’ you signed with our princess is.”

There were still people who disagreed with the ‘deal’ such as the highest authorities of the Anglican Church and Academy City. They felt that it was extremely risky for the treasure trove of knowledge—Index to be in Academy City, since information could be divulged. However, besides Necessarius, the ‘Knights of England’ shouldn’t have noticed that the safety seal on Index had been removed.

Even so, there were several amongst the ‘Knights of England’ who had inherited the invasive spirit of the crusaders and viewed Academy City as an eyesore. If it wasn’t for Tsuchimikado manipulating the information from behind the scenes, these people would have already attacked Academy City.

“Hidden inside the Church, I can definitely manipulate their thoughts to a certain extent, but the effect’s limited. I can’t do anything about the different sects, and

even if I’m to try and affect them, the thoughts and information that I manipulate will end up being distorted somewhere.”

Tsuchimikado paused, and then continued,

“I was already extremely busy over what happened to Aureolus. A magician has to be judged by another magician, you know this rule better than I do. Academy City has ‘science’, and the Church has the ‘occult’; as both sides deal with their own specialties, a balance could be achieved. If a magician got defeated by someone from Academy City, the occult skills that they so worried about defending for a long time will be stolen, and a huge crack will appear between both sides.”

Kamijou Touma, this boy had fought against several magicians during the past month, but among them, they had a deal regarding Stiyl and Kanzaki, and magicians like Aureolus weren’t affiliated to the Church, so there isn’t too much commotion.

However, this time, the seriousness was completely different in terms of definition. The one who had invaded Academy City was a magician who had ‘spells unique to the Anglican Church’, and she hadn’t done it with an agreement. Though it was tough to tell whether this was of a sect’s will or a person’s own actions, they couldn't just beat her even if she was acting on her own.

Sherry Cromwell had attained the highest honor of emblems restoration and interpretation at the Royal Arts Academy.

The so-called emblems referred to the patterns of grimoire codes hidden inside the paintings. For example, there was a painting of a boat on a sea looking outwards, and the sun’s gradually setting. To an ordinary viewer, this was just an ordinary view of the sea. But if one converted the seawater in the picture to ‘salt’, turned the sun to ‘gold’ and mixed and matched it up, the message ‘this picture’s aim was to detail the magic of using gold and salt to allow humans to swim in the sea like fish’.

Things like pigments, thickness, sunset times and location of the boat…any specific details could be converted into something that had a certain meaning to it. Thus, many times, the interpretations of the emblems were discovered to be wrong hundreds of years later. Thus, it could be seen that it was really hard to be

a real emblem expert.

If Index was the keeper of knowledge, then Sherry's expertise was in decoding skills, to seal or interpret them. If she landed into other powers' hands, the other party would understand the complicated ways of decoding that the Anglican Church had protected for so long.

If they were to beat Sherry down carelessly, it would create a crack in the relations between the Anglican Church and Academy City. If they sent Sherry for this purpose, they would definitely use this chance to widen the divide.

However, Tsuchimikado did not say what the outcome would be.

Or more likely, he couldn't say. Those words continued to rage inside Tsuchimikado even though he couldn't say it.

—The worst case scenario was that there would be a large scale war between the science side and the magic side.

Tsuchimikado glared at Aleister.

"It's true that the flame won't spread if we don't do anything stupid this time, but some people underneath the water may have to die in order to extinguish this flame. What is your mind thinking? If you exerted full power on security, it's way easy to prevent her from entering."

Tsuchimikado clicked his tongue and continued,

"Anyway, I decided to take down Sherry. At least there'll be less commotion when a magician takes down another magician. However, I won't be able to continue as a spy anymore. I'll definitely attract loads of attention when I do such things. Really, a spy should hide in the blind spots of others. How can I go on being spied on everyday…"

"You don't have to."

Aleister interrupted Tsuchimikado, rendering Tsuchimikado speechless.

Tsuchimikado couldn't even understand what Aleister had meant.

“I’ll say this again. You don’t have to take action.”

“…Are you serious?”

Tsuchimikado was suspecting whether the person in front of him was crazy.

“There’s a low possibility, but it’s not completely zero. Moving about under the surface like this is like walking on tightropes! If we’re not careful, we may end up starting a war!”

If the blueprints of a large number of destructive weapons were to land into other countries hands, that alone would be enough to warrant excuse for a war. If the magicians of the Church were to be imprisoned within Academy City, it would have the same meaning as well.

Truly, unless they did a really stupid thing, this shouldn’t be enough to start a war. But on the other hand, if they did something too stupid, it would start a war. This wouldn’t just be a war between countries, but rather, a war between two worlds, ‘science’ and ‘magic’ that exceeded even countries.

The representative of ‘science’, Academy City and the representative of ‘magic’, the Church had nothing to overwhelm each other. In other words, once a war started, it would become a quagmire.

“What are you really planning, Aleister? Do you really like to let Kamijou Touma fight against magicians? That right hand’s definitely a fatal ace against magic, but you aren’t stupid enough to think that that right hand is enough to destroy the entire Church, right?”

“It’ll shorten plans 2082 to 3277, that’s all.”

On hearing this, Tsuchimikado even forgot to breathe.

The so-called plan, or ‘process’. When Aleister mentioned this, there could be only one meaning.

“The way to control the Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution?”

Tsuchimikado said viciously. Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution. When Academy City was first built, it had been called the ‘first

research organization'. However, nobody knew where it was or even dared to confirm whether it existed, as if it was the city of shimmers. It was said that the organization had the 'fictional technology' that today's engineering was unable to match, and continued to control all power in Academy City from behind the scenes.

The 'outside' Church and magicians all thought that the Five Element Institution referred to a building, but that wasn't true. Of course, they couldn't reveal the truth.

No matter what, they could never let the outside world know that 'the thing', which had a strong influence on Academy City, was still hidden. Nobody could control it, and nobody even knew the reason why it existed.

As the ruler of Academy City, even if Aleister had to use all sorts of means, he had to find a way to control the Five Elements Institution. No, maybe Aleister knew of the way, but he lacked materials, most importantly, the key for it to work.

Maybe one way of describing the 'process' was Accelerator and the Level 6 Shift. Like that experiment, once they triggered certain events or problems in a particular manner, a 'key' would be created.

And a certain boy was right at the center of this 'process'

Kamijou Touma.

Tsuchimikado hypothesized that Aleister had intended to implement Kamijou Touma into his 'process' right from the start, and that the Index and the magic battle against the alchemist were just unexpected blips. However, every time an accident occurred, Aleister would again revise his 'plan' and fix the error, using that to shorten that already large 'process'.

This time, it may be the same for Sherry Cromwell.

Actually, even if he didn't intervene, the 'process' would be completed one day.

"It's all for such a trivial thing?"

"Looking at the armed forces and influence, it can't be seen as trivial. Like a

wild horse that can rip through the entire world, isn't it better to leash it for safety concerns?"

Aleister chuckled. No feelings could be detected in his smile. He looked like he was happy, and yet mocking, depressed, yet delighted. All sorts of emotions were mixed together.

How could there be such a ridiculous thing? Tsuchimikado clicked his tongue and pondered. If possible, Tsuchimikado wanted to ignore Aleister's orders and beat Sherry himself, but he just couldn't do it.

In fact, Tsuchimikado couldn't leave this building with just his own ability, because there weren't any exits, doors, windows, corridors or stairs. All the air required for living could be produced inside the building, so there was no need for air vents. And even if anyone was to forcefully attack, the building could remain unscathed even from a nuclear strike.

For a comparison, the situation could be said to be worse than being locked in a bank vault or inside a nuclear bomb shelter. In terms of bleakness, it was like a person being trapped in a spaceship outside the atmosphere without a single spacesuit.

"There's no way to contact the outside...oi, Aleister! Use your cable communicator to call that teleporter esper back in, or else I'll pluck out all the cables here!"

"As you wish, if you think that'll de-stress you."

Tsuchimikado let out a bitter look. Truthfully, he had already somewhat guessed that all the pipes, cables and machines were just a feint. If just these machines alone were enough to keep Aleister living, there wouldn't have been a need to build such a large building. It was likely that the huge cylinder was just a bluff as well, the figure inside may just have been a hologram.

Tsuchimikado leaned his back on the wall of the cylinder Aleister was floating in and inadvertently asked,

"Do you really believe that you can avoid a war?"

"The one who should have belief is you. You're the one in charge of the work

behind the scenes. Don’t worry too much, if you work hard enough, we’ll end this underground conflict without anyone losing their lives.”

“Damn it.”

Tsuchimikado cursed.

In the end, he ended up with the oddjob.

Chapter 1: Opening Ceremony. *Baby_Queen.*

Part 1

The morning of September 1.

Though Academy City, which covers 1/3 of Tokyo, was scorched by the sun, it was still covered by the cool air. There were very few pedestrians; only a Middle schooler bringing a dog for a walk and a University student jogging around. The wind turbines that were set everywhere were slowly moving, continuing to move this icy wind that seemed to come from deep within a forest.

However,

In this cooling scene, Kamijou Touma was dragging his tired body on the road.

“So…so tired…this shouldn't be a day that an ordinary High school student should be having…”

This High school student’s T-shirt and pants were all drenched, as if he had just ran a marathon. Because the clothes had absorbed the moisture, they seemed twice as heavy.

If there was a need to mention the reason, we would have to go back to one day before, the 31st of August.

Last night, Kamijou had met a man named Yamisaka Ouma. In order to save a woman he knew, both of them had left Academy City.

One thing that had to be mentioned was that ‘leaving’ here could be used interchangeably as ‘forcing a way out’. Academy City was surrounded by high walls, and they were tightly guarded by Anti-Skill. No one could get out without

a permit. In fact, if not for Yamisaka's help, Kamijou himself wouldn't have been able to get out. That magician had the nifty 'Confusing Demon's bow string' that could 'let them think that he had an exit permit'. However, everyone's mental barrier differed in strength, and the effect would differ. Sometimes, they had to force their way out as well.

"…So ridiculous. It took my half my life just to break through the security perimeter, and yet it became another intense battle later. These creatures called magicians, why are they always merciless to outsiders? If I have to write a diary, yesterday's exploits will be enough to fill one entire book up."

Before everything was over, he had to forcefully break through a second time with Ouma as an escort to get back into Academy City.

(…Ah, can finally see the dorm now. Oh, now I'm finally back to the ordinary daily life.)

Truthfully, he had only left the dorm for less than one day, and yet Kamijou felt that it had been months since he was last there. However, as Kamijou didn't have any memories of what happened before August, he was rather unclear about what it felt like to 'leave home for months'.

Kamijou dragged his tired and sleepy body as he shakily stumbled into the student dormitory. He took the elevator and then arrived in front of his room.

(Uu…I really feel like sleeping..)

Kamijou inadvertently gritted his teeth and yawned. If possible, he really wanted to collapse onto the bed and sleep for 2-3 days, but unfortunately, today was the 1st of September, the school opening day.

To Kamijou, who had lost his memories during the summer break, besides a few exceptions, he didn't really have any memory of most of his classmates. So to his other classmates, today may have been an ordinary day, but to Kamijou, it was not much different from being a transfer student. It would have been a bit too crazy for a transfer student to skip school on the first day.

(I don't really want to let anyone know…that I lost my memory. Besides, I won't be having lessons today. I'll just spend the day resting in school and pay attention to how I interact with others.)

The extremely unlucky Kamijou sighed with a sleepy feeling as he opened the door.

Just at this moment, a girl’s shrill voice could be heard within the room.

“TOU—MA!!”

The voice had anger within it, but nothing else happened. The girl didn’t rush at Kamijou, who was standing at the door.

For a moment, Kamijou revealed a surprised look…and then he remembered.

Just as Kamijou was trying to make his almost-sleeping brain work, the owner of the voice finally moved herself from within the room. The foreign girl with waist-length silver hair and white skin was wearing a snowy white nun's habit with gold embroidery. It did look rather extravagant, but for some reason, the seams were patched with safety pins.

This girl with a childish demeanor was called Index.

…However, right now, Index was all tied up in ropes. Unable to move her limbs at all, Index continued to twist her body around the room like a caterpillar. A calico cat skillfully sat on Index’s head and casually yawned, giving one the impression that ‘the following guilty’ era had arrived.

“WAH! I forgot all about this! Were you like this all that time?”

“Touma! You left me and ran off like that. Is this what you’ll say when you came back!?”

Index said as she revealed her fangs.

As explained just now, Kamijou had met a man named Yamisaka Ouma last night. In order to save his friend, both of them had fought together for the entire night. For them to do such dangerous things, they obviously couldn’t bring the weak (?) Index along. But after Index had heard both their explanations, she started kicking, hammering and biting. In this situation, Yamisaka could only use what could be said to be a rope binding spell to tie Index up and force her to wait quietly at home.

“It happens again, it happens again! Touma went off to fight by himself again…! Touma, anyway, just get these ropes off me! These shimenawa[1] form a mini-barrier. Touma just needs to use his right hand to destroy it!”

Touma’s right hand.

Within this right hand lay the power of something called the Imagine Breaker. As long as it was a supernatural power, whether esper or magic, everything would be erased with the single touch of the right hand. However, the weakness was that the power of the Imagine Breaker only existed on the right hand itself.

“However…you’re going to create quite the commotion once I undo the ropes.”

Index had a nasty habit of biting people when she was angry. Seeing her like this, releasing her would be like removing the collar of a vicious starving dog. To Kamijou, going to school on the first day with bite marks from a girl wasn’t a good thing…

At this moment, Index’s expression suddenly softened.

Basically, it was as if she was tricking a lost kid.

“Touma, if you release me right now, I won’t get angry. Why don’t you try it now?”

“…Really? You won’t get angry?”

“No.”

“You won’t start biting me when the ropes are released?”

“No no.”

Index revealed a Virgin Mary-like smile.

Kamijou bent over and lightly touched the ropes on Index, who was on the floor, with his index finger. Immediately, as if a spell had been cast, the numerous ropes unraveled off Index.

The next moment, Index, who was released, immediately pounced onto Kamijou without any hesitation.

“WAH!”

The girl bit onto Kamijou’s head viciously, as if a primitive just saw a huge slab of meat.

“TOUMA’S A BIG IDIOT!!”

“GYYYAAHHH!!?”

Kamijou cried out in despair, but it was too late. Kamijou could only jump about painfully through the room. The right hand with the Imagine Breaker could dispel any magic or esper power, but it was completely useless against the ferocious beast Index.

“You…you lied! You said that you wouldn’t be angry! IT HURTS!!”

“Of course I would be angry! Really, you knew that you’re going to fight against magicians, and yet you left me at home! Even if Touma has an inexplicable power, you’re still an amateur when it comes to fighting magicians! What would you do if something happened?”

Kamijou stared at Index’s face, who was close in. Though she looked rather angry, her eyes looked like they would tear up any second.

Index suddenly reached her hands out and hugged Kamijou tightly as if it were a memento.

“…Really, what should I do?”

Being hugged in her chest, Kamijou heard the voice from above.

The long silver hair let out a faint scent.

The girl’s body was trembling.

It seemed like she had been worried for the entire night when Kamijou hadn’t been at home.

“Sorry.”

Kamijou just said that.

He couldn’t say anything else.

Kamijou thought that he couldn’t let people who cared about him so much feel even more uncomfortable. Kamijou honestly wished not to hurt Index any further.

In fact,

Index didn’t know that Kamijou Touma had lost his memories.

She would be even sadder once she knew of it, so Kamijou chose not to tell her.

Part 2

Kamijou swayed about with his extremely sleepy head as he made breakfast for two. That said, it was just toast, bacon and eggs and vegetable salad and milk, four items.

On seeing breakfast, Index (and the calico cat) rushed towards the glass table. Kamijou however just bit into the toast as he moved through the room, dumping all the things he needed for the opening ceremony into his school bag.

"…Mm…slippers…stationery…got to hand in my holiday homework, right? It's today alright…sigh, never finished it in the end…and…a contact directory? Why don't they use emails?"

Maybe it was to prevent hackers, Kamijou casually thought of an answer as he tossed the contact directory that was made from a thick piece of paper into his bag.

At that moment, Index, who was sitting in front of the glass table alone, stared at Kamijou unhappily.

"Touma, are you really going to school?"

"Hm?"

Kamijou casually tossed the bag that was full of stuff onto the floor, finished off the remainder of his breakfast and placed his own cutlery back onto a rack.

"Ah…yeah. Once school term starts, you'll have to be alone at home."

"Humph…well…Touma…I'm not saying that I'm afraid of being lonely."

Truthfully, Kamijou himself felt that it was dangerous to leave her alone at home like this, but he didn't dare to say that.

Of course, Kamijou didn't forbid Index from leaving the room. However, it seemed rather dangerous to leave Index on the streets like that when she didn't know of the 'common sense' of Academy City. It had been almost a month since Index had arrived in Academy City, but she didn't look like she had adapted to this city. It seemed like he couldn't just verbally teach her the common trivia.

Based on past experiences, the fastest way was for Kamijou to continue to move with Index, but the problem was that he couldn't possibly let Index transfer into his own school. The magic side and the science side didn't really have good relations, Kamijou understood that. As an important person of the magic side, if Index was to have the same lessons as Kamijou and become an esper on the

science side, there was going to be trouble.

“As for that, I really have to think it through. Sorry Index, please stay at home for today. Just put the cutlery into the basin and rinse it with water.”

Kamijou said hurriedly as he looked at his watch.

Kamijou decided to head into the bathroom that had become his bedroom to brush his teeth, wash his face and then change into summer uniform. He really wanted to take a shower, but unfortunately, there was no time.

After roughly finishing up, Kamijou opened the bathroom door, only to see Index waiting in front of the door. Index stared at Kamijou with some rather deep thoughts.

“Touma, will you come back earlier today?”

“Mm, okay. Once I come back, we’ll go out to play.”

On hearing this, Index smiled happily.

Though Kamijou was happy to see Index smile so happily, he was feeling rather complicated. Right now, Index’s interactions with the outside world were all through Kamijou. Maybe it would be good to build Index’s relationships through ‘Kamijou’s friends’.

On one hand, this really was something lonely.

But regarding this, Kamijou couldn’t really chip in to help out, since if he wanted to settle the problem, Index would have to build human relations on her own and not through Kamijou.

“Alright, I’m going.”

Unable to help at all, Kamijou could only leave the problem aside for now.

“Mm, be careful on the way.”

Index said to Kamijou and smiled.

Less than 5 minutes after Kamijou had left the house, Index started to feel bored.

Though she had been asked to watch the house a few times, it didn't mean that Index was unhappy. For her lively personality, it was not hard to imagine how uncomfortable it was for her to do this.

The TV was switched on, but Index was not looking at it, instead lying on the floor as she played with the calico cat. After a while, Index stopped.

(So bored. I really want to go outside. I want to go find Touma.)

Index was filled with the impulse, but she immediately shook her head. She couldn't cause trouble for others just because of her own selfish reasons. It was easy to think of it the other way, what if Index was ordered to be recalled back to St. George Cathedral and Kamijou Touma came chasing because 'he got bored'…

Though she may have been happy, she would feel troubled.

For the magic expert Index, she definitely didn't want to expose her image at her workplace to Kamijou. It was rather embarrassing to show others one's other side.

The same thing applied, if Index was to look for Kamijou, Kamijou may have been bothered. Thinking about it, Index didn't dare to chase after Kamijou.

(Touma also said before that he'll bring me out to play when he comes back.)

Index again played with the calico cat and rolled on the floor. Though boring, I should endure, Index thought.

At this moment, she stopped again.

"…Eh? Touma, where's my lunch?"

Index turned pale as she muttered to herself.

She didn't have any culinary skills, and the snacks, like biscuits and stuff, had been ripped and eaten by the calico cat a long time ago, and they hadn't stocked up.

“What…what do I do now? This seems like the greatest calamity that I never had before.”

Muttering to herself, she inadvertently gazed at the door.

On the outside of the door lay the wide world with Kamijou Touma.

Part 3

On the other hand, Kamijou was dashing down the morning streets as he headed towards the school.

A vandalizing prank had been done on the rail track in the city. The train had actually stopped because someone placed a stone on the track.

In order to encourage students to take the school bus that was really expensive, Kamijou’s school forbade students from taking the train. On the surface, it seemed like it was to prevent students from creating trouble after school and prevent them from being harassed by perverts, but the real reason was to earn money by forcing the students to take the bus.

But in reality, the bus had only ½ the speed of the train, and yet the bus fare was 3 times that of the train’s. Anyone would want to take the train. Ever since he had taken the bus once during summer vacation, Kamijou had decided to secretly take the train to school as well.

But because of this ridiculous school rule, even if he was to show the certificate that proved that the train had a mishap, they wouldn’t erase the record of being late.

(Damn it…I’m already so tired and sleepy, and now there’s one entire morning of misfortune. Though I’m not the only unlucky one this time, I can’t feel happy even though I know this.)

While Kamijou was thinking of this with that sleepy head of his, someone

dashed past Kamijou at an amazing speed.

A middle-school-aged looking girl. She had shoulder length tea-colored hair and was wearing a short-sleeved blouse with a summer woolen jacket over it. The top matched the grey pleated skirt, and there seemed to be shorts underneath them. Truly a ‘I don’t care whether my skirt flips’ attitude, completely different from an ojou’s image.

“…Ah, so it’s you, Biri Biri.”

Kamijou, who was sleep-deprived and thus unable to think, finally understood who the person in front of him was.

Kamijou continued to run as he flicked his heavy eyelids and said,

“…Morning, as expected of the young to have so much energy early in the morning.”

Hearing this voice, the Biri Biri Misaka Mikoto unhappily slowed down and ran beside Kamijou, giving him an unhappy look.

Mikoto glared angrily at Kamijou, who was beside her, and said,

“How can you still talk to me so casually? Weren’t you ignoring me com, com, com, com, completely yesterday? Aren’t you the least apologetic?”

Kamijou rubbed his sleepy eyes and processed Mikoto’s words in his mind.

Speaking of which, on the 31st of August, which was last night, when Index had been taken away by Ouma, he seemed to have met Mikoto on the way, but as the situation had been really urgent, he had ignored her.

Kamijou and Mikoto continued to run really fast on the morning streets.
Kamijou said,

“Hm? What? You were looking for me yesterday? For what?”

“No…nothing, it’s not really urgent…”

“???”

Kamijou blinked his tired eyes and said,

“Ah, can I ask an unrelated question? If there’s nothing, why did you call me?”

“YOU…YOU’RE TOO NOISY! STOP GETTING NOSEY! Never mind, we’ll change topics! Do you normally take this road?”

Since when does anyone mention that she wants to change topics…Kamijou thought, but he didn’t say it out loud.

“…Nope. The train stopped today, so I came by this road. But then again, there’s only two stops, so it’s sort of a running distance.”

“Oh yeah. Why are you looking so listless? Are you afraid of early risers?”

Running beside him, Mikoto revealed a puzzled look. Kamijou ignored her stare and said,

“A lot of things happened yesterday, and I’m really tired. As for you, why are you so energetic today? Is this the power of youth?”

Yesterday, on the 31st of August, Mikoto had gotten involved in a little trouble as well. However, the one who had been victimized the most was Kamijou, who got involved in it…

“Wha…what, is the date…act really tiring to you?”

“Mm? It’s not just that…I got involved in something else as well.”

“Oh.”

Mikoto slightly heaved a sigh of relief.

Good thing that she didn’t give Kamijou a whole lot of trouble, Mikoto thought. Just as Mikoto was feeling relaxed, she pondered, and said,

“Eh? Something else? Oi…don’t tell me you did something with other girls?”

“Are you an idiot!? Most likely, only you’ll casually request others to do such an awkward thing.”

“WHAT…!?”

As he was sleep-deprived, Kamijou’s tone was rather flat, but on hearing that, Mikoto blushed.

“Who…who’s casual about it! I…I was bothered by it for a long time as well! I couldn’t think of any other way, so I could only drag you along!”

“…Ah. Okay okay, I understand.”

“Oi, are you seriously listening? Don’t you dare listlessly ignore what I say just like that!”

Just like that, with both of them having rather bad feelings, they continued to bicker all the way to school.

Part 4

After saying goodbye to Mikoto, Kamijou continued to run on, and finally saw his school.

(Seems like…I won’t be late. Ah, good thing I took part in summer remedial.)

He roughly remembered all the paths from the dorm to the school and the location map during summer remedial. Because of that, Kamijou didn’t need to take a map out and do some suspicious stuff and loiter around.

(There’re two buildings, the front one is the new one and the back is the old one. My classroom’s on the third level of the new one, it’s the second room from the right, and the shoe cupboards are on the right side of the staircase. Good!)

In order to act like he hadn’t lost his memory, Kamijou collected the information in his head and passed through the school gate like every other student.

The school had a flat campus, which was rather rare in Tokyo. The school wasn’t big, there was a school compound at both the front and the back, and there was a

corridor in the middle linking them together, making it look like a ‘’. There was also a semicircle roofed sports hall on the left, and a swimming pool on the right.

In this city that had 2.3 million students, there were all sorts of schools. Some had their swimming pools on the roofs, some had their gyms dug underground in a bunker, it was not strange to see all sorts of weird constructs.

But in this school, the layout was so ordinary it didn’t have any characteristics. The students passing by Kamijou were also wearing ‘model’ like uniforms, completely ordinary.

(That’s okay either way. It’s too troublesome to make it too special. Tokiwadai Middle School’s uniform should be rather terrible.)

Kamijou pondered wildly as he rushed towards the school entrance. He was almost late already, and yet this was the time when most of the students entered school. On the way, while rushing through the staff parking lot, Kamijou suddenly heard a sharp honk. Turning back to look, a car looked like it was about to reverse and park, only to stop halfway through and honk, scaring a white cat that was in the middle of it away.

It was a round-model small car that was bright green in color. However, the car itself sure was too small.

There was no passenger seat, instead, it looked like it was a one-seater.

(Woohh! That car is great! As light as a sheep, and there’s no need to worry about getting drenched by the rain! How about I get one? I can’t buy a car, but a bicycle…wait, never mind. If it’s my vehicle, if I park it in front of a train station, it’ll definitely be stolen.)

Already used to misfortune, Kamijou could already imagine the car being stolen, and could only sigh.

Then, Kamijou noticed that the elementary student-looking Komoe-sensei was in the driver’s seat, her hand was holding onto the steering wheel.

“—OI! DON’T TELL ME YOUR LEGS ARE LONG ENOUGH TO REACH THE BRAKES!”

“I…I can still drive even if I can’t reach it!”

Komoe-sensei deliberately opened the door and retorted.

Looking closely, the steering wheel of that small car was somewhat unique. There were buttons on the left and right sides, as if it was a joystick for a racing car game. Maybe the car utilized technology for the disabled, allowing the driver to accelerate and break through the buttons.

Komoe-sensei’s actions were unexpectedly steady as she easily parked the car. She pulled out what seemed to be a pile of folders with information inside them.

“Really. To say such words the first time we meet when you came back from summer vacation, sensei doesn’t remember teaching you these words—”

“(…Anyone who sees this will be worried about you…)”

Kamijou muttered as he turned away.

“What did you say, Kamijou? Are you thinking of running behind sensei and throwing sensei into the sky?”

“I’M NOT! YOU’RE BEING TOO SUSPICIOUS HERE!”

Kamijou and Komoe-sensei continued to talk loudly as they headed towards the school. Maybe there was still work to do before opening ceremony, as Komoe-sensei rushed forward in small steps. But every time the students greeted Komoe-sensei, she would politely stop and reply ‘good morning’, thus, even though Kamijou was merely walking fast, he was still able to catch up to Komoe-sensei easily.

“Oh yeah, what’s that pile of papers? Don’t tell me it’s a mini-test?”

“Kamijou, whatever bad things sensei experienced as a student body, sensei will never let you experience. Okay okay, don’t be so slow, hurry up.”

Komoe-sensei prompted Kamijou,

“These aren’t schoolwork, but a university friend of mine asked me to help read through some theses.”

“University…well yeah, you do have a teacher’s license.”

“Kamijou?”

Komoe-sensei looked puzzled as she tilted her head, staring at Kamijou, who was muttering to himself.

Kamijou again stared at the pile of papers, and then said,

“What’s on them?”

“Something not too difficult. It’s AIM research, and it’s rather related to you.”

On hearing this, Kamijou wondered, what was AIM? He had never heard of it before.

Komoe-sensei seemed to be rather mindful about the time as she started to speed up. However, she still continued to maintain her teaching spirit as she said,

“When you grow older, you’ll understand that this AIM is An Involuntary Movement…which also means ‘no awareness’. And the AIM diffusion field means the same thing. It’s like body temperature, an energy field that naturally radiates out from an esper.”

“Oh, like how Misaka’s body will let out weak magnetic fields, right…?”

“Ah, you’re talking about Misaka-san…eh? Misaka? Hold on, eh? No way?”

Komoe-sensei was stunned for a moment. She then continued,

“Anyway, AIM diffusion fields will differ according to the esper’s power. For example, a pryokinesis user generates heat, a telekinesis user generates pressure; these powers will generate from the espers’ bodies and scatter around. But as they’re rather weak, it’s impossible to detect them without a powerful machine.”

Komoe-sensei saw that Kamijou, who was moving very fast, was ahead of her, and immediately chased up.

“I see, so if there’s an esper that can detect that AIM whatsoever thing, the esper can detect whether there’re other espers around, right? Such an esper can go

‘hm? There’s powers nearby’ like a manga!”

“Hahaha, that’s right. If it’s even more powerful, it may even use the AIM diffusion field to detect how strong and what type of ability the power is. At this moment, the esper may end up saying ‘hm, this guy battle ability is over 70,000’. There’re all sorts of people with varied weird interests studying these things.”

Kamijou and Komoe-sensei dashed towards the school as they continued to talk, but immediately separated. The staff members had their own entrance.

After Komoe-sensei was gone, Kamijou heaved a sigh of relief.

(…Let’s go.)

He decided as he headed towards the school entrance.

To Kamijou, who had lost his memories, a school life of deceptions would now begin.

Kamijou had come to school for remedial lessons before, so he knew where his shoe locker and classroom were. Like an ordinary student, he placed his shoes in his locker, put on his slippers, walked up the stairs, into the corridor and arrived in front of his classroom.

But here was the tough problem.

When Kamijou was having remedial for the first time (about the time when he first met Misaka Imouto, actually, it was already a remedial of a remedial), there were only him and Komoe-sensei, so Kamijou had sat at the table in front of the podium, but that was not his original place. In other words, having lost his memory, Kamijou didn’t remember where he should be sitting.

(What should I do now…?)

Kamijou was slightly troubled by this, but it would be rather suspicious of him to loiter around outside the classroom. Though he couldn't think of anything, he still reached his hand out to pull the door open.

(Wah…)

Kamijou cursed as he walked into the classroom. There were less than half the number of students present, and they were all not sitting at their own place.

If all the students had been sitting at their own place, the last one left would definitely have been Kamijou's. But of course, things weren't going to be that simple.

Just at this moment, Aogami Pierce, who had arrived at school earlier today, saw Kamijou stunned at the door. The 180cm high school student walked towards Kamijou and said,

"Hm? What's up Kami-yan? Did you walk here only to remember that you forgot to bring your homework? If that's the case, it's really funny and pitiful."

After Aogami Pierce said this, everyone in the class turned to look at Kamijou.

And the class got louder.

"Ah? What? Kamijou forgot to bring his homework?"

"Eh, Kamijou, did you really forget to bring your homework?"

"BANZAI! SENSEI'S EYES WILL BE ATTRACTED BY KAMIJOU'S MISFORTUNE! OUR DAMAGES WILL BE REDUCED TO THE MINIMUM! BANZAI!!"

Seeing the entire class cheer like that, Kamijou inadvertently let out an impatient look.

Though his own father was really bothered that his son was treated like this, to Kamijou himself, this was just a common thing in the daily life of a manga.

"Oi, don't tell me you guys didn't do your homework? Komoe-sensei will cry!"

Kamijou couldn't help but press against his temple. He knew that he wouldn't be able to make it, and right now, he was too stupid to even rush through his homework.

At this moment, Aogami Pierce thievishly said,

“Don’t worry, that sensei loves problematic students more than good students. Komoe-sensei seemed really happy when she saw that 2/3 of the class needed to take the summer remedial.”

“…Don’t tell me she went to a bar alone to cry?”

“Ahhaha, what nonsense are you spouting, Kami-yan? I deliberately left my finished homework at home so that Komoe-sensei would scold me!”

“I DARE SAY THAT SHE’LL CRY! ARE YOU GUYS LITTLE KIDS WHO SPECIALIZE IN BULLYING YOUR CRUSH!?”

Kamijou couldn’t help but shout, but such a thing was abnormally normal in this classroom. Everyone started to return to their own conversations.

Being finally able to stop crossing paths with a bunch of weirdos, Kamijou really wanted to sit at his own place, and he could take a slight nap during morning assembly, but he just didn’t know where his seat was.

(What should I do now? I can’t just honestly ask ‘where’s my place’ right?)

Kamijou pondered for a while, and then said to Aogami Pierce,

“’Cuse me, but can you help me get my notebook? It’s in my drawer.”

“What’s up Kami-yan? Forgot to bring it back before summer break?”

On hearing Kamijou’s words, Aogami Pierce obediently headed towards a table at the back of the classroom that was near the window.

(I see, so that’s my place.)

Kamijou saw Aogami Pierce peek at the drawer of the table and thought,

“Oi, Kami-yan! Where’s that notebook?”

“Ah? Eh? I didn’t put it in the drawer?”

Kamijou casually replied to the puzzled looking Aogami Pierce and finally sat at his own place.

Aogami Pierce also sat at the neighboring seat, and both of them started to chit-chat.

“In the end, after that so-called scholar launched that electric brain, he started to promote some manga brain. What an idiot. If reading manga can change the brain, wouldn’t power development become way too easy? But it’s cool to change every power development textbook into manga.”

“Ah, but those manga that are used as teaching materials are normally rather boring. They seem to have so much lesson content.”

“Damn you! What’s exciting are the things behind these useless things! Haven’t you realized that those kids-rated cartoons and special effects films have such devastating destruction? Do I need to punch you to wake you up?”

“Why are you so excited? I’ll feel strange if those teaching materials can actually turn one into a Level 5 esper.”

Like usual, Kamijou continued to discuss useless things with Aogami Pierce, and slowly found himself merging into this space.

It had been a month since he had lost his memory, and the Kamijou sitting there was no longer the blank-slate-state Kamijou. It was as if the 'he' who had lost his memory was overlapping with the 'he' before he had lost his memory.

Kamijou now had memories that he could discuss with others.

But that was just for Kamijou.

To that white nun, it was likely that none of the problems were solved.

Kamijou didn’t remember meeting with Index, but from the way their conversations went, it seemed like Kamijou and Index had only met recently. Most likely, the amount of time he had spent with Index after losing his memories was more than the time before that.

But that didn’t mean anything.

In the short time before he had lost his memories, Index had trusted Kamijou. To her, the memories in that short moment were treasures that she definitely didn’t

want to lose.

Right now, Index and Kamijou were rather close, but Index didn't know something.

That was, Kamijou had lost his memory, and no longer held those precious memories of being with her.

"Kami-yan? Oi, Kami-yan?"

Hearing Aogami Pierce's voice, Kamijou finally recovered.

"Ah, oh, sorry. I didn't sleep last night, so I'm a little dazed."

Kamijou tried to motivate himself and returned back to the fake everyday life.

Part 5

"Okay okay—morning assembly's about to start—there's not much time till the opening ceremony, so we have to hurry up!"

Almost everyone was at their seats when Komoe-sensei walked into the class.

"Eh? Sensei, where's Tsuchimikado?"

"Sensei didn't hear him report sick, maybe he overslept."

Komoe-sensei tilted her head as she answered Kamijou.

"Ah—before I take attendance, sensei has something to announce to everyone. A transfer student will be joining us today—"

Mystified, everyone stared at Komoe-sensei.

"This transfer student is a girl—congratulations, you perverted wolves—don't be too disappointed, kitties—"

“WOOOHHHH!!!”

The mood in the class started to boil.

Among them, only one person, Kamijou was getting a bad premonition for some reason.

Impossible. In this life of Kamijou Touma that was full of misfortune, there couldn’t possibly be something like ‘an ordinary pretty female transfer student’.

(…Is this some sort of a set-up to hide some terrible truth?)

Considering Komoe-sensei’s relations with others, the person most likely to be the transfer student was Himegami Aisa, but the world was so big, anything could happen. Maybe Misaka Mikoto would falsify her age and transfer in, maybe Kanzaki Kaori would come rushing in, or maybe it would be the Suzushina Yuriko who was really Accelerator, or maybe it would be the almost 10,000 Sisters all squeezing in here and increasing the student population by more than 10 times, or maybe it would be an angel with hidden wings having descended into the human realm.

“Damn…damn it! I’m actually getting interested in this!”

“Kamijou? Why are you holding your head and muttering to yourself?”

Komoe-sensei tilted her head as she asked, and then said,

“Anyway, I’ll let her present herself! The detailed self-introduction will have to leave till after the opening ceremony is over—will the transfer student please enter—”

The moment Komoe-sensei finished saying, the classroom door opened.

Who’s the student? Kamijou stared suspiciously…

He saw a white nun carrying a calico cat.

“WHAT…!”

Such an unexpected development caused Kamijou’s mind to go blank.

Everyone in class also didn't seem to understand what was going on, because Index was definitely not wearing an ordinary uniform. Things like 'what's that church school uniform?' were whispered throughout the classroom.

However, Index remained unmoved.

"Ah, Touma, so this is Touma's school, right? I'll have to thank Maika later for bringing me here."

With these words from Index, everyone turned at Kamijou.

Everyone's eyes seemed to be telling him: you again.

"…Ah, eh?"

For some reason, even Komoe-sensei, who was intending to introduce the transfer school, was stunned when she saw Index at the door.

"Hold…hold on a sec, Komoe-sensei. What's going on?"

Kamijou inadvertently asked Komoe-sensei, but it seemed like Komoe-sensei herself was rather shocked by this sudden development, and only managed to recover after hearing Kamijou's voice.

"Sister-san! How did you get in? You're not the transfer student, go out, go out —!"

"Ah, but I want to look for Touma. My lunch…"

Index seemed like she wanted to say something else, but Komoe-sensei tried to force her out by pushing her back out.

Kamijou stood up instinctively.

"Ah…oi, Index—"

"Kamijou, please don't get involved in this!"

"Oh!"

Kamijou wanted to chase up, but Komoe-sensei shouted to stop Kamijou. She

was not angry, but she did look like a child who would cry any second soon as she pushed Index's back.

Kamijou could only stand about blankly as he saw both of them leave the classroom.

The person who replaced them was a long black-haired girl.

"The real transfer student is me, Himegami Aisa."

Seeing the familiar face, Kamijou heaved a sigh of relief as he collapsed onto the table.

"Thank…thank goodness. Good thing that it's ordinary Himegami, and she's wearing an ordinary low-profile uniform, not a miko outfit. Thank goodness…"

"I do feel some evil intent in your words."

On hearing Kamijou utter the word 'ordinary' here and there, Himegami seemed rather unhappy.

Part 6

Having been chased out of the classroom, Index puffed her cheeks as she walked along the classroom.

She was holding 2,000 yen. That was what Komoe-sensei had stuffed into Index's hands after saying 'why did you come here? Go home! Don't follow strangers! Here, use this to take a taxi back!'.

(…Touma actually showed such an expression.)

On remembering the scene just now, Index's jaw dropped. It had been a month since she had started living together with Kamijou, but that was the first time that Kamijou had actually given such a painful look the moment he saw her. Obviously, he had 'rejected' her.

Just as Index was wondering what to do with this lonely feeling, she got hungry again. When it rains, it pours, Index thought as she bit her lip unhappily.

At this moment, she passed by a cafeteria.

The aroma of fried vegetables and food floated in, causing the calico cat that Index was carrying to purr. Index stopped.

"…I'm hungry."

As she recalled, as Kamijou had been in quite the rush this morning, the breakfast that he had made was a little subpar. In terms of satisfaction, the grade was only about 40%.

Like a zombie, Index crept into the cafeteria.

Though the cafeteria was large, the set-up was rather simple. There were about 100 sets of 1 round table and 4 metal chairs. There was a counter at one corner of a wall, and the kitchen seemed to be behind. The sound of food being fried could be heard from the kitchen, and there were three coupon vending machines near the other wall.

(Mm, I did read it up in a manga before. If I put money into that thing, there will be a food coupon.)

Index compared the image in front of her with the knowledge in her brain and made this conclusion. Right now, besides 'The Kinugyokutoshū' (The Moon and The Rabbit), 'The Book of Creation', and 'The Book of the Law', the library in Index's brain had stockpiled a few shounen manga. Stiyl and the rest would definitely faint if they were to know of this, but for Index, who was able to store her memory appropriately, this didn't seem to be a major problem.

Index was standing in front of the vending machine.

She pulled the crumpled piece of 2,000 yen note flat and inserted it into the machine.

(See, I can do it. Touma always said that I can't catch up to the times, said that I'm old fashioned. This sort of thing won't stump me. Now, all I need to do is just to press the button.)

Index felt slightly proud, and just as she reached her hand out and intended to press the button…

She stopped.

Because there wasn't a single button on the coupon vending machine.

(Ah? Eh? This…what's going on? Where should I press?)

There seemed to be some table lamp strip on the vending machine, and there was a liquid crystal display on the front, each showing the prices. Other than those, there was nothing else. There were no other options to choose from.

In fact, this coupon vending machine was similar to the ticket vending machine at a train station; both used touch screen display. However, Index didn't know that.

(Ah…eh? Ah…uuu, yeah, that's right, got to get back the money first. Ah…eh? How do I get the money back? Where's the button?)

The 'cancel' button was also at the edge of the display, but that had already become a psychologically blind spot to Index. Ever since she had seen the calico cat claw at a cooking show on the TV screen to no avail, Index didn't think that 'reaching out to touch it' was a meaningful thing to do.

Index grabbed the vending machine and shook it as she peeked into the coin outlet, but this action obviously wouldn't do anything.

"Uu…uuuuuuuu…I became as unfortunate as Touma…"

Index collapsed weakly in despair. She was like the High School baseball players who lost in the Koshien Finals as she sighed in despair. Only the calico cat didn't understand the situation as it casually yawned.

At this moment, footsteps could be heard from behind.

Just as Index was feeling rather intrigued, someone tapped her shoulder.

The opening ceremony was held in the sports hall.

The students were all exiting the classrooms and heading to the sports hall, causing the entire corridor to be crowded like a train station during a vacation.

At this moment however, Kamijou didn't move along together with his classmates. The reason was simple, because he was worried about leaving Index alone.

"Damn it…though I have no right to say this, she gets into trouble very easily!"

Besides that, there was also another problem. Since Index had photographic memory, if she were to see the esper development program, the magic side may have ended up getting information on the science side's secret intel, but of course, Kamijou hadn't thought that much.

Anyway, he had to find Index. Kamijou kept his sleepy mind active as he ran along the corridor.

The one who had tapped Index on the shoulder was a girl who she had never met before.

She was taller than Index, but shorter than Kamijou. Her hair was black with a light tinge of tea, but it seemed like she didn't dye her hair; instead it seemed to be a natural color. Her hair was long, about waist-length. However, there was a small bunch of hair that split at the ears, with a rubber band holding. She had a knowledgeable look with those spectacles on her, but they seemed to slide down for some reason. Index stared at the chest of the person. Unfortunately, based on this protrusion from the inside, the girl beat Index by quite a margin.

(Who is she?)

Though Index didn't have the right to say that to someone else, this girl was wearing a different uniform from the people at Kamijou's school. The female students here all wore white short-sleeved sailor blouses with a deep blue skirt. However, this girl was wearing a short-sleeved collar shirt and a long blue skirt. The red tie that seemed to be used by the men looked rather eye-catching over the white and blue clothing, but this was also obviously different from this school's uniform.

Index exchanged looks with that girl.

A pair of tiny animal-like eyes could be seen behind the spectacles that dropped down slightly.

“That…you need to press that button.”

“Eh?”

“That…button on the screen…”

The girl said softly as she pointed at the coupon vending machine with her finger. After a while, Index recovered as she saw the liquid crystal display that was attached to the vending machine.

Right now, Index was showing a look of a child who was lost in a country where she didn’t know the language.

“Button? But there’s no buttons on it?”

“Eh…”

The girl seemed to be rather puzzled.

“What I meant is that…you just need to touch the screen…don’t you know? Ah, uu…please don’t look like you’re about to cry.”

“You’re lying. I know that there won’t be any change even if I touch the people in the TV.”

“…”

The girl silently walked towards the vending machine and pressed the cancel button on the corner of the screen.

With a ‘crack—’ rotor spinning sound, the vending machine spat out the 2,000 yen it had just swallowed. Index was stunned by this.

“How…how did it become like this?”

“That…that’s why I said that you just need to touch the screen…”

“A…amazing! Is this TV connected to the inside?”

“Eh…this isn’t the TV…”

“Amazing, this is amazing! Do it again! Do it again!”

Facing this sudden shout, the calico cat purred in protest. For some reason, Index was so abnormally excited that she forgot that she was hungry, as she reinserted the 2,000 yen note that was had just been spit out back into the vending machine, staring at it like a girl watching a magician.

The girl revealed a reluctant look as she again pressed the ‘cancel’ button.

The 2,000 yen note was ejected again. Such a simple thing, and Index was already giving a look of admiration.

“Then…then what about this? What’s this ‘filter condition search’ thing?”

“Eh…you just need to insert the keywords here, and it’ll list all the things that doesn’t include the keywords…for example, those who are allergic to eggs just need to type in the word ‘egg’, and this thing here will list out all the things that don’t include eggs…”

“Then what’s this? What’s this information search?”

“Exactly as what it says…it can use numbers to search for nutritional values like Vitamin C or Iron…for example, if you’re looking for less than 150 kcal…it’ll come up with a diet meal.”

The girl continued to explain the unnecessary details, yet Index was as excited as a child, as if she was some kindergartener who dreamed of being an astronomer hearing the introduction of a spaceship. The girl again continued to get praised, revealing a look of whether she should be happy or not.

After explaining everything, Index smiled at the girl, and said,

“Thank you. What’s your name?”

“…Mm, Kazakiri Hyouka.”

In the end, Index and Kazakiri didn’t order anything, instead merely taking up the chairs of the cafeteria as they started to talk. Though they were talking, it

was mainly just Kazakiri hearing Index complain. Index was concentrating too much about complaining and forgot that she was hungry.

“In the end, I called Touma’s name, but Touma didn’t answer me, and he even looked away. Really, it’s Touma who forgot about making lunch…”

Kazakiri stared at Index, and then at the calico cat Index was carrying.

“Uu…mm…but basically, outsiders are prohibited from entering school…if you’re seen by the teachers, it may be troublesome…”

“But Hyouka, didn’t you do the same thing?”

“I…I’m alright, because I’m a transfer student…even though I don’t have a uniform…”

“Then I want to be a transfer student too.”

“…Eh…”

Kazakiri Hyouka frowned, giving a look of not knowing what to say.

“Anyway, I want to floor Touma up pretty good. I don’t want to go home like this, and if I don’t ask about lunch, I might really have a hunger crisis.”

“But…your attire is too eye-catching…”

“Hm?”

Index noticed the clothing on her.

A pure white nun's habit with gold laces, it was as eye-catching as one huge princess robe, but Index was too used to it that she didn’t notice it.

“If you’re caught…that person will be rather bothered, right…”

“Then what should I do?”

If it was someone with a tougher personality that didn’t have a good choice of words, the likely words would be ‘hurry up and go home’. However, Kazakiri Hyouka could only frantically roll her eyes and say,

“…Eh, the infirmary may have extra uniforms…but they may be ordinary PE attire instead of standard uniforms…”

“PE uniform? We won’t get discovered if we wear them?”

Facing this naïve problem, Kazakiri Hyouka revealed a bothered look.

If one was to consider through common sense, no matter what, it was less conspicuous than the nun's habit Index was wearing. However, today was the opening ceremony, and there wouldn’t be any lessons, so it was too eye-catching for them to wear PE attire. Also, no school would allow pets to be brought in. However, she couldn’t think of any better idea…after thinking about it for a while, Kazakiri said,

“…Nn, definitely…should be…possibly…maybe…unlikely?”

Unable to respond properly, Kazakiri finally gave an ambiguous answer.

Index and Kazakiri walked down an empty corridor.

“Oh…that’s right, how does a PE attire look like?”

“Eh…how should I describe it…they’re clothes meant for sports. The materials are specially selected, and are rather elastic, so they’re rather comfortable, and dust won’t stick on it easily…”

“A…amazing! Is this the ‘hi-tech stuff’ that Touma talked of?”

“…Eh…”

“Amazing! Oh yeah, Hyouka should wear it too! It’ll be great!”

“……Eh…that…”

Being weak in personality, Kazakiri was unable to imagine the wild imagination of the petite Index as she could only let herself be dragged away by Index, the corner of her eyes behind the spectacles secretly shedding a tear.

At this moment, Kamijou was still looking for Index.

Right now, the crowded corridors just a while back were completely empty. Kamijou continued to run throughout the corridors as he secretly sighed. The opening ceremony should be starting soon.

(…Damn it! And I was so close to mixing into the class! Oh well, at least the opening ceremony is just about listening to what that principal has to say…how does that principal look like anyway? Oh well, better go find Index first.)

Kamijou looked around in all directions as he continued to run.

At that moment, he could hear a familiar voice.

(Hm? This voice is—ENEMY PLANE DETECTED! THE MODEL IS A STUPID NUN!)

He stopped and pricked his ears. It was the sound of a girl happily chirping about. There was no one nearby, but the voice was extremely clear. Kamijou turned to where the voice came from and frowned. The sign on the door said ‘infirmary’.

Kamijou’s mouth inadvertently twitched.

(Da…damn it! I dragged my sleep-deprived brain all around to look for you, and you’re actually fooling around on the bed of the infirmary? That’s too much!)

Kamijou placed his hand on the infirmary door and pulled it open.

“Oi! Index! What are you doing inside the infirmary? You’ll only get one disease called the 10,000 year 5 month illness!”

Pa! Kamijou pulled open the door of the infirmary hard.

Feeling extremely motivated, Kamijou decided to lecture Index good today.

But like a manga scene, what he saw was girls who were changing clothes, two of them.

One of them was the nun he was familiar with, but for some reason, she was not wearing the nun's habit, but short-sleeved gym shirt and shorts…and she was only wearing the shorts halfway through. She was bending her back, with both hands on the sides of the shorts. She stopped what she was doing, her mouth was twitching.

The other was a girl he had never met before, she was wearing some other school's summer uniform. The girl had long hair, but a small bundle of it was tied up in a rubber band and extended out to the side. Maybe it was deliberate or second nature, but the spectacles of the girl slid down slightly. However…the main point was that the girl's shirt was unbuttoned. She was holding onto a short-sleeved shirt, and she was completely frozen to the spot. Only those small animal-like eyes behind her spectacles looked like they were about to tear up anytime soon.

The two girls who were unable to register the current situation stared blankly at Kamijou.

Only the calico cat was unable to register the danger as it washed its face with its front paw.

Facing this almost certain death situation, Kamijou could only shout,

"……EH, I GOT INTO THE WRONG ROOM!!!"

The next moment, both girls' faces were blushing.

Kamijou sincerely hoped that the reason they were blushing was because they were embarrassed, but that wasn't the case.

The next moment, the angry scream and the sound of something breaking roared into the skies.

Part 7

Right now, Kamijou Touma was extremely angry.

He should be the one who was grumbling, but for some reason, he had witnessed two girls changing clothes, which meant he should apologize. However, because of this alone, he got scolded by Index and even got bitten on to such an extent that there were bite marks on his head, and Kamijou really couldn't explain why this had happened.

However, Kamijou still brought the two girls who had changed back into their own clothes to the cafeteria. Kamijou and Index ended up quarrelling with each other, while the stranger just stared at both of them and looked like she didn't know what to do. The calico cat curled itself up, not caring about what was going on.

Sleep-deprived and unhappy, Kamijou said in a deep voice,

"Oh yea, who's she, Index?"

Once Kamijou asked, the girl jerked her shoulders for some reason. In contrast, Index continued to remain unhappy as she said,

"I don't know, but she's a friend."

"You don't know? How can you not know who she is?"

"I don't know, but Hyouka's a friend!"

While both of them were shouting, the girl called 'Hyouka' was trembling like an animal. She then inhaled deeply and said cautiously, "O…okay, okay…", wanting to help them settle their dispute.

"My…my name is…Kazakiri Hyouka…what's yours?"

"Hm? Mm, Kamijou Touma."

Kamijou just answered, but for some reason, Kazakiri's shoulders jerked again.

Seeing this, Index grumbled,

"Touma! Stop scaring Hyouka! Don't worry…Hyouka, Touma's hot-blooded,

indecisive, and a rare specimen of one who'll help every girl he sees, but he's a good guy."

"…Ah…eh…I don't know how to 'don't worry' in this situation…"

Hearing Kazakiri's solemn thoughts, Kamijou's lips turned slightly numb.

Probably seeing that Kazakiri was nervous, in order to calm her down Index said,

"Here, Hyouka. I'll lend you Sphinx. Carry it, and you won't be so stiff."

"Erm…is Sphinx…the name of this cat?"

The calico cat lay on the round table without any restraint as it revealed its stomach, making a 'here, Missy, I'll let you pat my chest' gentlemanly gesture and raising its front paw to do a banzai pose.

Kazakiri was a little hesitant from the start, as she only dared to let her hand swim slightly in the air before stroking the soft abdomen of the cat gently.

Then, Kazakiri said,

"Ah…how warm."

Kazakiri's face unknowingly revealed a smile, and on the other hand, the calico cat trembled as if someone had grabbed its paw, as it was gritting its teeth, enduring it and saying "Don't…don't worry, Missy…this…won't stump me…haa!". As for Kamijou, he was completely ignored.

"Mm…mm. do you want to hug Sphinx? Though there might be a bit of fur, it's comfortable to hug it."

"Uu…erm…eh, like this?"

Kazakiri imitated Index as she carried the calico cat slightly and stuck into at her chest. It wasn't any different from what Index did.

But the calico cat's head was buried within Kazakiri's chest.

Kamijou, who was staring coldly at this, immediately blushed and turned his

head away from the completely defenseless Kazakiri. The calico cat also tried to struggle, as if saying, “Uu…oo, M…Missy! Even I can suffocate!” Kazakiri also started to panic, and the calico cat jumped out from it. It landed onto the round table and shook its head.

However, the two girls didn’t seem to understand why the calico cat would do such a thing.

“Eh…an animal’s five senses are sharper than a human’s…maybe my smell is different from yours…”

“Don’t feel bad Hyouka. If that’s the case, you just need to build a relationship with Index…Touma? Why did you turn your head away?”

“Nothing.” Kamijou replied.

Kamijou turned to look at the calico cat who was the only other being that knew the truth. The calico cat merely purred twice, as if telling Kamijou, “There’re some things in this world that’s better off left unsaid.”

Feeling rather awkward, Kamijou tried to change the topic, but he was afraid that Kazakiri may have been fearful of men, so he directed it at Index.

“Oh ya, why did you come to school?”

“Uu, yeah, Touma. Lunch, lunch. You went out without preparing anything. I may have died if I remained at home.”

“Today’s the opening ceremony, I would be back before lunch!”

“How…how would I know if you didn’t say that?”

“How do you not know? That’s common knowledge!”

“This is Touma’s common knowledge, not mine! Then do you know, Touma? In English rituals, if you want to activate an Idol creation spell by using the Telesma that’s infused into a Cross, the interior positioning of the Church is directly related to the caster’s position! In fact, the defensive magic array is used to protect the body from getting involved in the aftermath of the main spell, and it has a strict rule of thumb. Once the position is change, the secondary defensive spell may be unable to work normally. Touma, do you know the Golden ratio? Say it, that’s common knowledge.”

“O…okay okay…”

Just like that, Kamijou continued to argue with Index, and Kazakiri Hyouka had to interrupt them every 20 seconds.

And on the other hand, Komoe-sensei was infuriated.

(Where—is—Ka—mi—jou--? To skip lessons on the first day of school, he actually has quite some guts. Hoho…hohoho…hohohohoho…)

Having realized that Kamijou wasn't inside the gym, Komoe-sensei revealed a dark smile that was rarely seen as she started to look for Kamijou…

(Uu…however, maybe he's feeling unwell or injured, so he had to absent himself…is Kamijou alright?)

Burning inside as she was looking for the student who had skipped class, Komoe-sensei was thinking about this seemed like she was still a gentle teacher.

At this moment,

Komoe-sensei heard a conversation near the cafeteria. All the staff and students should be gathered at the gym.

"Don't tell me…"

Komoe-sensei carried a suspicious feeling as she approached. It was Kamijou Touma.

And there were two girls beside him.

Though they were quarrelling, there was a weird jolly vibe.

(Ha…haaa…)

Having worried for nothing, Komoe-sensei's anger broke the limit.

She let all the air enter her lungs before shouting,

"KA…KAMIJOU! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!?"

Komoe-sensei shout caused the calico cat that was curled up on the round table

to jump up in shock and nearly fall off the table.

Kamijou and company stopped talking as well as they turned their heads over.

The female teacher who was 135cm tall and looked like she was 12 stormed into the cafeteria. Maybe it was because she was too angry and the blood was rushing up that even her ears were all red.

“Ah…eh? Komoe-sensei? Why are you here? Isn’t it the opening ceremony now…”

“Are you even allowed to say that, Kamijou? Sensei was worried that you weren’t in the gym and came out to look for you! And yet you’re here having quite the sweet school life! If you’re going to continue flirting over here, sensei will have to lecture you on the basis of impure opposite gender interaction!”

“What flirting…sensei, can’t you see that we’re arguing here?”

“Arguing with a casual look on your face is called flirting! And… and why is it that Kamijou always has a girl appear beside him? Does Kamijou have some sort of weird AIM diffusion field?”

“Wha…what do these two things have to do with each other? Do we have to talk about it right now?”

Just like that, Kamijou started to quarrel with Komoe-sensei—

—5 minutes later, the conversation was getting weird.

“Tsuchimikado never came to school and yet Sister-san came to school, sensei’s already having a headache over that, so please stop creating so many problems! Sensei really can’t stand your casual attitude towards girls!”

"What Tsuchimikado and Index do has nothing to do with me! And just to be clear, Kamijou-san is very straight-laced about this kind of thing! The only flags I ever get are the meaningless ones that don't activate any events!!"

“Ka…Kamijou! You’re living such a romantic school life and you dare call yourself hardcore?”

—Ten minutes later, and the conversation got even weirder.

“Why is it that when it comes to girls, Kamijou’s movements and thinking ability will improve by multi-fold times? Sensei hopes that you can use that on your studies!”

“Hold…hold on a minute. Are you thinking that ‘I’m a guy who likes to do weird things in order to get girls close to me’, sensei?”

“…Actually, it’s the opposite. It’s that you betting on your own life will cause girls to become closer to you. Haven’t you realised that, Touma?”

“Damn it! Even Index is saying this…?”

—15 minutes later, and the conversation was completely out of point.

“An…anyway, sensei will lecture Kamijou thoroughly in the counseling room!”

“Touma, Touma, you still have to apologize to me.”

“Ahhh…that’s enough! I’m already having a headache due to sleep-deprivity, so stop saying such ridiculous things with such high decibels! Oi, Kazakiri, help me talk them out of it! You’re the only kind one here…eh?”

Kamijou looked puzzled; Index and Komoe-sensei turned their eyes over.

Kazakiri Hyouka, who should have been sitting at the same table, was now completely gone. The place she had been was now an empty metal chair.

“…Ah…don’t tell me she couldn’t take it any longer and left?”

Kamijou asked, but obviously, he couldn’t get an answer.

Part 8

Having been chased out of the school, Index leaned her back on the metal fence

near the school as she waited for Kamijou. The calico cat in her arms looked rather tired.

“…Eh…that was really scary. I was shocked.”

A soft voice came from behind her. Index turned her head around to see Kazakiri Hyouka, who had vanished because she couldn’t stand it, was now standing right in front of her.

“That’s common. Why didn’t you talk with us just now, Hyouka?”

“Really…? But that teacher looked really angry.”

“Komoe wasn’t really angry. Why are you so mindful, Hyouka?”

“Because…you looked rather sad…”

After Kazakiri said that, Index remained silent.

After a while, Index said,

“…Touma’s angry.”

“?”

“I quarreled with him quite a few times, but this time seems to be different. Touma didn’t listen to me at all. He was angry, not smiling at me…”

Hearing what she herself said, Index's face crumpled.

Index was very lively when she was quarreling, but she seemed really depressed.

“Does Touma hate me now…?”

Index lowered her head and muttered.

(Or…)

Index didn’t want to say the next words.

(Or maybe Touma hated me right from the beginning, and I only just realized

that.)

Index bit her lip slightly.

Maybe the arms were exerting extra force as they carry the calico cat, as the calico cat was meowing in protest.

On seeing this, Kazakiri smiled lightly.

“…That’s not the case. To quarrel… is a proof of good friendship.”

“Why? Quarreling will hurt others. I’ll be hurt if I hear someone say something bad about me. Friends with good feelings won’t say anything that will hurt others.”

“Friends who are able to quarrel…”

Kazakiri said calmly,

“Are friends… who can be together even when they quarrel. A friendship won’t end because of a quarrel. That person… because he believes in you, he won’t break off with you just because of a quarrel… thus, he could quarrel with you without holding back.”

“Really?”

“That’s true… if not, do you think that it’s better not to quarrel? Because if you don’t want to quarrel… you have to hold in your feelings, and you have to laugh even when you don’t want to… and it’s over once you quarrel… you just have to give up on this friend and go make another one. Do you want this thin ice-like relationship…?”

On hearing that, Index revealed an unwilling look.

On seeing Index’s expression, Kazakiri smiled.

“I don’t want it to be like this. I want to be with Touma forever.”

Index said.

“Mn… since you can think of this… you don’t have to worry about your

relationship… at least he would be angry about you. It should be alright.”

Kazakiri Hyouka said to Index.

However, she added on something else,

“…But he's also the kind of guy who speaks to you with a straight face even when you're naked…”

Kamijou was finally freed from Komoe-sensei’s lecture.

The corridors, classrooms—nobody was around. The opening ceremony had ended together with the assembly, and everyone had gone home. There were the voices of people talking, probably of those taking part in extra-curriculum activities. The cafeteria continued to operate even on opening day, most likely for these people.

Until now, he still hadn’t met Tsuchimikado. Who knew whether he really came to school today?

(…Ugh…so tired…)

Being sleep-deprived and fatigued, Kamijou was as tired as a piece of cooked vegetable leaf.

The time seemed to be past noon, and he was hungry. Kamijou returned back to the empty classroom to collect his school bag and walked towards the entrance of the school compound. He took off his slips and changed back into his shoes. While walking through the school, he passed by the soccer players who were warming up. At this moment, he could see Index and Kazakiri Hyouka standing near the school gate.

“Oi—”

Kamijou shouted at them as he headed towards the exit.

“Oh, it’s Touma…”

“Hm? What’s wrong? Why do you look so depressed?”

“What…no…nothing…”

“Oh? Good that everything’s alright. Where are we going to eat? Don’t choose a place that’s too expensive.”

On hearing Kamijou’s words, Index revealed an intrigued look.

“Touma, aren’t we eating at home today?”

“It’s a hassle to eat at home, and don’t you want to go play after we eat?”

“…”

“What? I told you this morning, right? Did you forget?”

“I…I didn’t forget…”

Index blushed as she hugged the calico cat tightly. The calico cat purred twice impatiently as it started to struggle.

Kazakiri chuckled.

“Oh ya, does Hyouka want to come along?”

“Eh…can I?”

“Why not? Touma will agree, right?”

“Yeah.”

Kamijou replied quickly, without a second delay. Kazakiri looked surprised.

“Erm…thanks…”

She said softly as she stared at Index’s face.

“Mm, since we’re going to play for the entire day, we need money. Sorry, but I need to go to a convenience store to get money. Wait for me here.”

After saying that, Kamijou headed towards a convenience store that was near the school and operated the ATM that was near the door.

All the students in Academy City had a scholarship they could claim, and the money would be automatically banked into their accounts like a salary.

On first glance, it was a system that was worth being envious over, but basically, it could be considered a contract for esper development. The more prestigious the school, or the higher the Level of the esper, the greater the reward. In contrast, the esper would have to take part in more research.

As for ordinary Level 0 school students like Kamijou, the reward they could get was rather limited.

(…Though it's a human experiment, it's not really that scary.)

Kamijou randomly thought as he stuffed the money into his wallet and walked out of the convenience store.

At this moment, he heard someone,

"Oi oi, that boy over there! Aren't you too careless?"

Hearing the female voice, Kamijou turned his head around, only to see a rather glamorous looking woman in a green sports jacket standing there. Her long hair was tied behind her head, but this careless feeling added to the intriguing sexy feeling. Looking closely, the woman had an armband on her; it seemed like Anti-Skill.

It was rare to see such female Anti-Skill member, and the reason was simple. Though there were equal job opportunities for both men and women in Japan, the ratio between men and women in a defense force was still unequal. It was the same logic.

She looked at Kamijou, and said in an exasperated tone,

"Don't carry your wallet around near an ATM so openly. Wouldn't people be tempted to rob you?"

"Eh? Ah? Oh… sorry."

Kamijou didn't seem to understand the situation, but he felt he might as well apologize. The woman in the sports jacket seemed satisfied though as she said,

“Mm, nn, be mindful of it next time, boy.”

The woman gave Kamijou a smile and then disappeared.

Kamijou inadvertently scratched his head.

Though Anti-Skill members were trained fighters, their real professions were teachers. Though by law, civil servants weren’t allowed to have a secondary job, the rule didn’t apply well to Anti-Skill. That wasn’t because it was an exception, but because Anti-Skill did not earn any extra money. Simply put, Anti-Skill personnel weren’t much different from those who helped to patrol the night streets voluntarily, but they were more professional. Anti-Skill had to take part in dangerous activities, and the reward they got was just some Anti-Skill privileges. But even so, Anti-Skill’s work was rather popular. That was because Anti-Skill members could use their identities as teachers to gain convenience when lecturing students, and once they were officially Anti-Skill, they would be extremely respected by students.

(Speaking of which, she’s been walking around here. Don’t tell me she’s a teacher from our school…? Damn it, I just spoke to her as if I just met her. But seeing her attitude…seems like she doesn’t know me…)

Thinking about this, Kamijou felt that someone was tugging at his shirt. Turning around, he saw Himegami standing in front of him.

“Eh? Himegami? What are you doing here? Aren’t you going home?”

“…You’re really cold to a transfer student.”

“Ah…”

Speaking of which, today was the big day—‘Himegami’s first day after transferring schools’, but because Index had appeared out of nowhere, he had forgotten all about it.

“So I’m really a woman with such a faint existence.”

“Ah, no way, don’t feel so distressed. It’s just that there’s not enough sunlight around you…”

With a ‘DANG—’ sound effect, Himegami collapsed into despair. After a while, she lifted her head up and said,

“Leaving this aside…”

“(Leaving this aside…? She’s really as unpredictable as ever…)”

“I overheard some things. Is that bespectacled girl called Kazakiri Hyouka?”

“Hm?”

Kamijou turned his head around.

Index and Kazakiri were standing near the school gate that was far away, and both of them seemed to be chatting happily, but Kamijou couldn’t hear them.

Kamijou again looked at Himegami.

“Ah, yes, her name is Kazakiri Hyouka. Is she your friend?”

“…”

On hearing Kamijou’s words, Himegami turned to look at Kazakiri, who was far away.

She seemed to be staring, yet observing, however, she was not looking at her with kind eyes.

“Oi, what’s with you?”

“Let me confirm this again. Is her name really Kazakiri Hyouka?”

“Hm… she herself said this, and Index also said this. Of course, I didn’t see her ID, but there’s no reason to suspect her, right?”

“Kazakiri… Hyouka…”

Himegami again muttered this name.

“Do you know the High School I previously attended?”

“Eh…don’t know.”

“Kirigaoka Girls’ Academy. It’s a star school that can rival Tokiwadai Middle School in terms of esper development. Tokiwadai specializes in following the orthodox method of developing high-Level espers, while Kirigaoka specializes in developing espers with powers that are strange, unique and hard to replicate.”

“Oh…”

Kamijou replied.

It was true that Himegami’s Deep Blood ability was an esper power that was of not much use in science. If so, Kamijou’s right hand may have been heavily noted in Kirigaoka Girls’ Academy. However, Kamijou did not have any intention of studying in a girls’ school.

“I once saw the name Kazakiri Hyouka at Kirigaoka.”

Himegami seemed to add extra emphasis on Kazakiri’s name.

“So she’s a transfer student like you?”

For some reason, Himegami didn’t reply. Feeling slightly intrigued, Kamijou asked,

“Since Kazakiri was from Kirigaoka, it means that she has some amazing ability like you, right?”

Even so, Kamijou wasn’t feeling surprised. He already knew the strongest Electromaster, and his own power was pretty unique.

However…

“I don’t know.”

“?”

“Nobody knows what Kazakiri Hyouka’s power is.”

Himegami paused, and then continued,

“When the school unveils the score rankings, her name is always at the top.”

“Oh… so she’s that smart.”

“No, this has nothing to do with being smart. Kirigaoka’s rankings are purely based on ‘how rare the power is’. In other words, Kazakiri’s power is just extremely rare, but it remains to be seen whether it’s useful.”

Himegami paused again, and then continued,

“Also, nobody even knows which year and which class Kazakiri is. Everyone in Kirigaoka knows of this name Kazakiri Hyouka, but nobody saw her before. However, her name will always appear when the results are out.”

“…What’s going on?”

“It’s all a mystery. I once asked a teacher out of curiosity, and the teacher secretly told me that the teachers call Kazakiri Hyouka the ‘Counter Stop’.”

Himegami didn’t stop.

“But this isn’t the point. The teacher told me that the most important thing isn’t the Counter Stop name, but something else.”

She then continued,

“It’s said that Kazakiri Hyouka’s the key to the Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution.”

Kamijou frowned.

Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution. It was the first research facility in Academy City and no one knew where it was now. It was said that there were many latest ‘Imaginary technology’ that couldn’t be used, and the rumors went that it was secretly controlling Academy City from behind the scenes, the mastermind.

The mysterious organization that should exist, yet no one knew its exact location.

That feeling gave a strange vibe like a certain girl.

“The teacher told me that there’s a special lab that’s used to analyze Kazakiri Hyouka’s ability. It’s rare to have a research lab set up just to research on one person’s ability, so it’s said that the research lab isn’t meant to investigate the Counter Stop, but the Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution.”

Himegami pondered for a while, and then continued,

“However, that teacher had never seen Kazakiri Hyouka before. There’s a research lab, and her name will appear when the results are out, but even among the teachers, only a few know of her true identity.”

“But… this seems to be a little too…”

“Nn, I don’t know how much of it is true, so I’ll just give an advice. However, it’s better to be careful.”

After saying finish, Himegami seemed like she finished what she had wanted to do and she turned to leave.

“Ah, hold on. We’re going out, so do you want to join us?”

Himegami turned her head around, and her expressionless face seemed to show some surprise.

“…Komoe… that idiot.”

“Eh?”

“Nothing. Someone asked me to do something, so I can’t come along.”

Himegami said coldly, then turned her back to Kamijou and walked away. Kamijou looked stunned as he saw the back of the depressed Himegami. Suddenly, Himegami seemed to remember something as she stopped and turned to Kamijou. She asked,

“Oh yeah, why did that Kazakiri Hyouka come to our school?”

“Eh? Index seemed to say… she’s a transfer student.”

“Oh.”

After a while, Himegami said,

“But the records indicate that I’m the only transfer student.”

Kamijou was speechless. Himegami left for real this time after saying ‘anyway, please be careful’, and Kamijou turned his eyes from Himegami to the two girls near the school gate.

Kazakiri Hyouka, who was chatting happily with Index, looked like an ordinary person no matter what.

She didn’t seem like someone who would be involved with that mysterious Imaginary Number District.

(Really, I don’t know… whether that’s purely a rumor, or a fact…)

Kamijou scratched his head as he walked towards them.

Index and Kazakiri smiled as they invited Kamijou back.

The cat meowed.

There didn’t seem to be anything strange.

At least not yet.

Between the lines 1

There were many Middle school and High school students at the road in front of the train station.

As every school had an opening ceremony today, all the students who were released had gone out to the streets to play in the afternoon, and a certain corner of a train station in front of a large department store was exceptionally squeezed.

Shirai Kuroko was amongst this packed crowd.

She was about as tall as an ordinary Middle school girl, and her tea-colored hair was tied into two ponytails. She couldn't be considered pretty, but she could be considered cute. She was wearing the Tokiwadai Middle School uniform, and she had an armband on her right arm.

The armband had the word "Judgment".

Judgment was a security group that specialized in taking down espers; it was a group that was similar to a police riot force. All Judgment members were espers, and in contrast to Judgment, the security forces of teachers that were equipped with the latest weapons were called Anti-Skill.

The security was divided into two systems in order to let both sides check on each other and prevent internal corruption. Besides these people were basically just 'students' and 'teachers', and nobody could guarantee that there wouldn't be people who would abuse their authority like bad cops.

(…Really, why can't they just separate the entertainment facilities a little further? Didn't the creator of this city have any psychological sense of transport and environment?)

As a fellow 'student', Shirai grumbled, her mind seemingly forgetting the land prices and customer gathering effect.

Like many others, Shirai hated to be in crowded places. Though it was nearing the end of summer, the weather was still hot. There was a special reason why she would come to this hot and crowded place in front of the train station.

(Found her…)

Shirai was staring at a person 10m in front of her. She took out her phone and compared the person with the photo on the phone. The foreign looking woman seemed to not notice Shirai's presence as she brazenly walked through the crowd, seemingly forgetting that she was being pursued.

Before 7 AM this morning, there were two unknown intruders in Academy City at different parts of the walls.

As one of them was under the jurisdiction of Anti-Skill, as a Judgment member, Shirai wasn't really clear about it. All she knew was that it was a student who was registered under Academy City. Maybe it was a corporate spy?

Shirai was in charge of chasing after someone else.

The photo on the cell phone screen was an enlarged image of what the surveillance camera caught. The blond woman actually attacked from the 'entrance' of Academy City, forcing her way in and causing 15 people to be wounded, 3 severely injured.

At the moment, Academy City had already launched a 'special alert status', which was also known as 'red alert'. It had already sealed off access from outside, and all the Judgment members had requested leave and were now looking for the intruder.

Just like that, Shirai Kuroko had not even attended the opening ceremony as she continued to patrol the streets for several hours…

(At this point, according to standard protocol, I should request for backup, evacuate the people and then carry out the arrest. But it'll be too time-wasting; I'll probably lose the best chance to arrest her.)

Shirai muttered as she continued to keep her eyes on the target, who continued to move forward.

Though the security's divided into two systems, normally speaking, the ones at the frontlines weren't Judgment members, but Anti-Skill. That was logical, since Judgment members were all students. Shirai's orders were just to 'find the intruder', and the rest of the work was to be done by Anti-Skill. However…

(I can't let Anti-Skill handle this. Seeing the current situation right now, there're already so many injured people. Better for those without abilities to fall back.)

Shirai thoughts were based on the self-belief of being a Level 4. To her, those teachers who needed to strap themselves with lots of weapons were really weak.

Shirai didn't wish to let Anti-Skill get work that they couldn't take. If Anti-Skill, who came to help her, were injured, she would have nightmares at night. If so, she might as well go fight herself.

She reached her hand into her pocket.

What she took out was something similar to a mini-handgun, but the barrel's more than 3cm. It was a special gun that fired signal-type bullets.

(Really don't want to use this…I'll have to write a report when I use it.)

Shirai raised the gun and pointed it at the sky. She then squeezed the trigger.

With a comical 'BAM' sound, a lipstick-size metal cylinder slowly rose 7m in the air.

Then, with a sudden boom, the glaring flash scattered from the metal container. All the pedestrians were terrified by the sudden burst of light as they covered their eyes with their hands and rooted to the ground.

But at that moment, everyone's actions were rather swift. Once the shrieks and roars subsided, everyone immediately moved towards the nearby buildings, even the university students and the teachers abandoned their cars and headed into the buildings.

Every resident of this city would know this.

This was an evacuation order that the security forces would let out. It meant 'there will be a battle here, so please don't be involved in the gunfight that'll start within 30 seconds'. The originally busy road in front of the train station was now completely empty.

Only Shirai Kuroko and the woman were left.

The woman who was in the middle of that flash didn't run or shriek, instead merely stood around casually.

They were about 10m away from each other.

Shirai stared at that woman.

One could tell that she was a suspicious woman. She was wearing a black-based robe that had white laces and butterfly knots all over the place; maybe it could be considered a gothic outfit. It should fit a blond haired green-eyed girl really

well.

That woman had blond hair, but her skin was really rough.

She should be more than 25 years old, and it seemed like she hardly took care of her hair, as it popped up like a lion's mane. Her skin was brown, but it didn't match the sunlight. Her robe looked rather old; not only was the cloth tattered, the white laces were now yellowish. Basically, she couldn't be considered a beauty, but there was some wildness to her. She looked like a woman who had the illusion of a luxurious gothic lifestyle completely destroyed.

"Please don't move, my name is Shirai Kuroko, and I'm a security member tasked with protecting this city. You're under arrest. I believe I don't need to explain further, right?"

However, the blond Godiva hair woman didn't respond to Shirai's words.

The decadent, emotionless woman just moved her neck slightly and looked around. It seemed like the disappeared citizens were much more interesting to her than Shirai.

After 5 seconds, she finally turned to look at Shirai.

"Ending search…you really added quite some trouble for me."

The woman's voice had some contempt in it, and it seemed like she hadn't expected to see an opponent at all. Shirai couldn't even twitch her eyebrow before the woman quickly reached for something in the tattered sleeve of that old black gothic robe—

—At that moment, Shirai Kuroko was already right in front of the woman.

The 10m distance between both of them was erased by Shirai.

The casual expression on the woman's face was now mixed with a little surprise.

However, Shirai didn't intend to explain further, because there was no need to. This was the Level 4 Teleport ability.

Shirai Kuroko reached her hand out and grabbed the woman's wrist that was

covered by the tattered lace.

Then, the woman unknowingly landed on the ground. There was no pain, no impact, and more importantly, no memory of falling. Basically, Shirai just used her Teleport ability to teleport the woman to the ground the moment she touched the woman, but to the woman who didn't know what was going on, this may have seemed like some mysterious judo technique.

The woman seemed tired even as she dodged. Just as she rolled on the floor and intend to stand up…

"I told you—"

DONKA DONKA DONKA! The hi-speed impact of a sewing machine needle-impact-like sound could be heard.

Looking closely, the woman's robe and all the excessive cloth on the dress were pierced through with 12 needles, and the woman was stuck on the ground.

"—Not to move. Don't you understand Japanese?"

Shirai said silently.

That was also an attack that used the Teleport ability. The needles that were hidden underneath her skirt were instantly teleported to the targeted location. They not only had the rapid-firing power of a machine gun, as they were moving from space to space, they wouldn't be blocked by anything, and there was no need to worry about anyone getting hit by the shots. It could be considered a dangerous way to attack.

However,

Even after seeing such power, the woman remains unmoved.

Only…

The mouth on the mask-like face slowly and silently extended to both sides, forming a long smile that reminded one of a Kuchisake-Onna.

“What…?”

Instead, it was Shirai Kuroko who was surprised as she frowned.

Suddenly, a huge explosion occurred behind her.

“..What’s going on…?”

Though Shirai was shocked, she didn’t have time to look back. The entire asphalt road rolled up, causing Shirai to be tossed high into the air. Shirai finally managed to look behind after landing on her back.

A giant arm.

It was just like a long-necked dragon that probed out of the water. There was a long ‘arm’ grown out of the road that was longer than 2m. This ‘arm’ was shaped like a human’s, but the materials were asphalt, bicycles, road signs, anything that was around. It was like something that was shaped from clay, a mechanical arm that was attached to heavy machinery when a demolition work was under way.

Shirai frantically tried to escape from the place, only to find that her ankle was stuck into something.

The ground and the ‘arm’ rose up, causing the fragments of asphalt to gather together, and Shirai’s ankle just so happened to be stuck in it.

(…Ah…uu…to think that this outsider’s… an esper…?)

The force on her ankle got bigger as Shirai’s expression inadvertently worsened.

Turning back to look, the woman who was pegged onto the ground seemed to be holding some white-chalk like thing as she wrote something strange on the ground.

Those weren’t signals that research labs use, but they looked like some random magic codes.

Maybe it was like a cell phone that used short and simple buttons to replace long codes; and maybe she prepared some special codes to hypnotize her and hijack my powers. Shirai, who didn’t know anything about magic, could only use what

she knew to analyze the situation in front of her.

(This…isn't good…got to hurry up and stand up…!)

Shirai tried to regain her composure, only to find out something.

The 'arm' that extended from the ground had a raised portion, and Shirai's ankle was stuck in it. The lump was shaped in a circle, and it looked like a human head.

Her ankle seemed to be bitten by the 'teeth' of the asphalt road.

(Damn…it…)

Shirai's ability was called Teleport. It was not limited to 3 dimension rules, so she could move about freely within space.

However, there was a weakness to this ability. Though the phrase 'to teleport within space' sounded simple, the theory behind it was to get away from the 3 dimensions, find her position in the 11th dimension, and then calculate the vectors to teleport. Such calculations complexity couldn't be compared to the simple commands that ordinary espers would have, like 'fire a fireball', 'fire electric strikes'.

So once she was in pain, anxious or confused, or when she was unable to remain calm, she would lose her calculating ability and thus wouldn't be able to use her Teleport ability.

The 'teeth' on the asphalt road brought a clattering sound as it occupied a smaller area, and Shirai was already screaming in pain.

(Ah…ack…uu…!)

She just needed to teleport away in order to escape, but she was unable to think properly due to nervousness.

Looking closely, the woman on the ground was revealing a slight smile as she merely scribbled on the floor with her wrist moving the white chalk. The giant 'arm' seemed like it was being controlled as its movements were slowly changing. It seemed like it was changing angles to squash a worm on the floor.

Shirai understood this, but she was unable to move.

The sharp pain and the fear of death affected her calculation ability, causing her method of teleporting away to be rendered useless.

It was like having a key to a nuclear shelter, only to lose the key.

The woman waved the white chalk in the air, drawing curvy lines on it, and the five fingers of the ‘arm’ tightened. The ‘teeth’ that were biting on Shirai’s ankle exerted even more force, causing her to close her eyes in pain.

PAPAPAPAPAPAPA!!

She closed her eyes, and could only hear a spine-chilling ridiculously-loud noise.

But that was not the sound of Shirai’s ankle being bitten off.

It was also not the huge ‘arm’ that was made of rubble slamming down.

But the sound of the ‘arm’ being sliced off.

(Ah…ah…?)

This sudden strike caused Shirai to open her eyes in shock.

The ‘arm’ was sliced off horizontally. Before she could even look clearly, the ‘teeth’ that’s holding Shirai’s ankle down got destroyed, releasing Shirai. Shirai’s body inadvertently rolled back after regaining her freedom. The cut parts instantly collapsed upon impact and scattered in all directions, forming back the original shape.

BOUM…! The sound of bees buzzing about that was magnified several hundred times echoed through her ears.

Looking closely, something that looked like a black whip and yet like a long sword extended about 10m in the air. This was the thing that was making the bee buzzing sound. Looking closely, it was formed by iron sand. The large amount of iron sand was being manipulated by magnetism as it vibrated.

Basically, it was a hi-speed chainsaw.

Zzz! With an air-ripping sound, the iron sand returned to the owner.

(Hold on…manipulation…magnetism…? Don’t tell me…!)

Shirai Kuroko coughed violently as she tried to take in more oxygen and turned her head around.

The one standing in front of her was…

Misaka Mikoto.

‘Ding’, a soft metal sound could be heard.

It was actually the sound of Mikoto flicking a coin with her thumb. The coin slowly, slowly, flipped above Mikoto.

Mikoto said,

“Though I don’t know why you’re fighting—”

The sliced off ‘arm’ stood upright, forming a large pile of rubbish. However, this tower seemed like it had its own will as it collapsed falling, aiming at Shirai Kuroko.

But at that moment, the coin returned back to Mikoto’s thumb.

“—BUT I WON’T ALLOW YOU TO HURT MY FRIEND!”

At that moment,

The one hit from Mikoto, also known as the ‘Railgun’, caused the coin to travel at 3 times the speed of sound. It heated up due to the friction with air, forming an orange laser as it hit the ‘2-staged tower’. The large impact destroyed the ‘main tower’, and the ‘head’ was also affected as it exploded to smithereens.

BOOM! The terrifying explosion could be heard after a delay.

The surrounding area was covered with smoke, but the strong wind pressure that was created scattered the dust away. This was the after-effect of the Railgun compressing the air.

(Am…amazing…)

Though Shirai was still wary of the surroundings, she was focused on something else.

(The strong winds created by the shockwave already far surpasses what a wind esper can do. Onee-sama's ability's too terrifying, too stunning!)

On the other side, Mikoto slowly walked towards Kuroko, as if the danger was over.

"Ah, Kuroko. No need to be so jumpy now. That large arm was a diversion. It wasn't the Railgun's power that caused the explosion; the arm self-destructed. See, that stupid woman ran away when the smoke's flying about."

Mikoto slightly stuck her tongue out as she stretched her arm out and pointed a finger.

Shirai turned back to look. The woman whose robe had been pegged down by the metal needles had already disappeared. Pieces of black robes remained on the ground, and they looked like the remains of cement.

"Oh ya, who's she? Since you're chasing her, it means that it's part of Judgment's work, right?"

"Mm, yeah. Seems like she's an intruder…onee-sama…"

At this moment, Shirai's legs wobbled as she held onto Mikoto.

"Hold on, oi! What's with you having this kind of weird fantasy even at this moment…"

Mikoto remained stunned for a while before thinking of pushing Shirai away. However, she did not do so.

Shirai was gently grabbing onto the thin summer vest.

Mikoto could already tell from this small area that Shirai's body was trembling slightly.

"Really can't be helped with you."

Mikoto sighed softly as she wondered…

If at this moment, if she was the one trembling, what would that boy say?

"Kuroko, you really like to take things into your own hands. How can you take down that kind of enemy? The Law never stipulates that you have to fight your enemy alone, you know."

Mikoto understood that the words themselves didn't have any meaning to it. The significance was in the actions and the feelings she was trying to convey.

"Just look to me for help if you can. Once you see that something's wrong, just contact me and don't wait till things get out of hand. Don't think that this will cause much trouble to me. The more dire the situation when you ask me for help, the more it proves that you trust me. I won't refuse at all."

Mikoto patted Shirai's head gently.

At that moment, the kouhai who had leaped into Mikoto's arms said,

"…Fufufu…such a rare opportunity. To approach onee-sama in this situation, I can enjoy this wonderful chest…fufu…fufufufufu…!"

"WHA? AH…EH? HOLD ON…I…I'M SERIOUSLY COMFORTING YOU HERE! YOU'RE TREMBLING DUE TO EXCITEMENT!! KUROKO!!?"

Mikoto blushed as she shouted, but it was too late.

Shirai Kuroko wrapped her arms around Mikoto’s back, pressing her face into her beloved onee-sama’s chest as she rubbed into it.

Chapter 2: After School. *Break_Time.*

Part 1

“Ohh! Touma, is this the famous underground world?”

“It’s not an underground world, it’s an underground street.”

Index said this in an excited manner, and the sleep deprived Kamijou slowly made a snarky comment.

There were many underground streets in Academy City. With the train station at center, there were many underground levels linking to many department stores; it was just like a maze. The crowd there wasn’t as packed as the road in front of the station, but there were a lot of students moving about.

Like the security robots and the wind generators, the underground street was one of Academy City’s experiments. As Japan had limited land and was earthquake prone, it had a natural desire for the world's greatest underground construction technology. Academy City was used as an experimental site for this, so various areas around Academy City had been dug up.

There was no special reason as to why they would choose this video arcade, it was just that Index had never been into the underground.

“Anyway, let’s go eat. What do you want to eat, Index? Don’t choose those that are too expensive or have a long waiting queue.”

“It’s alright not to go to those shops. It’s alright if it’s cheap, delicious, plentiful, and not many people know about it.”

“…It’s already tough to find such a shop. What about you, Kazakiri?”

Kamijou said this as he turned to Kazakiri. For some reason, Kazakiri's shoulders jerked; and she hid behind Index.

(What did I do now?) Kamijou wondered to himself.

"…Ah…no…I'm…sorry…I'm not…afraid…"

Kazakiri stood behind Index as she said cautiously,

"…It's just that…you saw me naked just now…"

"What?"

Kamijou couldn't hear the last sentence.

"Ah…eh…it's nothing…it's just…it's just that you definitely saw me naked…so why aren't you mindful…eh…"

Kazakiri was muttering to herself, and Kamijou couldn't understand a single bit. Kamijou thought, since she promised to come along, Kazakiri shouldn't have found Kamijou irritating or been afraid of him or something, but what was with this stranger-like vigilance?

Index looked like she understood Kazakiri as she coldly said to Kamijou,

"Really, Touma's expression is too scary."

"What? What's so scary about it?"

"It looks just like a beast! The eyes of one eyeing a weak girl! Silently telling her with that 'don't see me as being friendly, there's no prey that'll escape from me' expression! It's really scary!"

"Then aren't those some strange ideas that you instilled in her that made her all scared?"

Kazakiri shoulders seemed to react to Kamijou's shout as they trembled again. She hid behind Index, trembling as she said timidly,

"…That…that…"

“Look, Touma! Your shouting made Hyouka even more afraid!”

“Ahh…alright, alright! I understand, treat me like a beast! Since I’m a beast, I’ll show you a beast! LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT AN EVIL KAMIJOU IS REALLY LIKE!!”

“…Well…I’m not…afraid…it’s just that I want to propose…lunch…”

Kazakiri said in a barely audible voice. The duo who was arguing and almost giving up immediately shut up on hearing her, turning towards her at the same time.

Kazakiri Hyouka pointed a finger.

Following where she was pointing, they saw a restaurant.

Part 2

“School cafeteria?”

“Yes, a school cafeteria.”

Like the time when they had entered the underground street, Kamijou explained it to a thoroughly confused Index.

The Kamijou trio walked into what looked like an ordinary popular chain restaurant. They were seated at a 4-seater table, Kamijou and Index were facing each other, and Kazakiri was sitting beside Index.

On a side note, the calico cat was resting on Index’s lap. They had originally thought that it would be illegal for them to bring pets in, but unexpectedly, cats were acceptable. Looking closely, the company that owned the restaurant was the same as the one that operated the chain of restaurants that allowed pets in.

“There’re too many schools here in Academy City, so one can already form a restaurant by choosing the best from all the cafeterias. Even though it’s a school

cafeteria, it does have diet value. Once you arrive here, you'll be able to tell what the other schools are eating."

"Oh, but Touma, what's the meaning of a diet lunch in a school cafeteria?"

asked Index, as she stared at the huge drawing board-like menu with a taunting look.

Truthfully, as Kamijou had lost his memory, he didn't remember what a diet lunch for compulsory education was. However, there were still some remains of knowledge inside him, so he roughly knew what that was.

"Basically, that's just food that can only be obtained from school."

"So…so cool! Is this the so-called limited edition?"

"…Ah, whatever, I'm too lazy to explain. That's right, it's really rare!"

"Erm…since you ignored it…because you're too lazy…I don't think that it's really…"

Kamijou was too lazy to retort since he was sleep deprived, and Kazakiri could only mutter two sentences back, but these words didn't seem to reach Index's ears. Index's face was blocked by the huge menu like a father who only read newspapers. Then, Index peeked her eyes out from above the menu and said to Kamijou,

"Touma, I can choose anything?"

"Ah—don't choose one that's too expensive."

Kamijou said casually, but deep inside, he was not really nervous. That was because all the dishes in the shop were either those that originated from school cafeterias or diet lunches, so logically, they shouldn't be too expensive.

'PA!' Index slammed the menu onto the table, pointed at a photo in an angle such that Kamijou was able to see it, and said,

"I want this."

“Hm? Which one?”

Kamijou looked at where Index’s slender white finger was pointing. On the menu, it read:

‘Tokiwadai Middle School Diet Meal—4,000 yen’

Without saying anything else, Kamijou closed the menu and knocked Index on the head with the corner of the menu.

“It hurts! Why did you suddenly hit me!?”

“Didn’t I say that you can’t choose those that are too expensive? Are you intending to ignore me like that?”

That electric Middle-schooler was actually eating such delicious food? Kamijou inadvertently wondered. He gingerly opened the menu again and took a look. The photographs of dishes looked like a deluxe meal that could only be eaten in a highly decorated restaurant, seemingly shining.

“…Ah…then…I want this…”

Sitting beside Kamijou and Index, who ware making a ruckus, Kazakiri Hyouka pointed her finger at a certain dish on the same page.

The photo of this diet lunch looked ordinary, a simple French loaf and milk.

Kamijou was looking somewhat touched, maybe because there was finally an example for Index to learn from.

“Watch and learn, Index, this is a good student’s answer.”

“Wah, Hyouka’s tastes are so bland. I prefer to eat something fancy.”

Facing Index, who was still arguing, Kamijou sighed.

“When you choose food, you should go by taste and not appearance, Index. Also, DON’T TRY TO USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RECOMMEND KAZAKIRI THE TOKIWADAI MIDDLE SCHOOL DIET MEAL, IDIOT! KAZAKIRI’S ALL DEJECTED BECAUSE SHE GOT LABELED AS BLAND

AND WONDERING WHETHER SHE SHOULD CHANGE ORDERS NOW!”

Kamijou couldn’t help but shout out. On hearing this, Kazakiri seemed like she got shocked as she quickly grabbed the huge menu and blocked her face. It seemed like her relationship value with Kamijou just got so little that it was impossible to drop any further. It seemed like trying to get it back was harder than trying to ascend into Heaven.

After a while, the trio’s serving of meals was served.

The contents included paper-carton milk, French loaves (one can choose to spread margarine), meat and potato stew, salad, fried chicken, and cup-sized yoghurt for dessert. According to the waitress who was dressed like a diet lunch server, the characteristics of the diet lunch was that it mixed both Japanese and Western cuisines, ignoring international diversity. The price was slightly higher than an original diet lunch because the ingredients used were different even though the dishes were the same, and they couldn’t mass produce to lower the cost.

“Alright, everyone, let’s tuck in. Oh yeah, Kazakiri, why did you choose this? Is it because you like yogurt?”

The dishes of this shop were sorted by schools, so besides the contents of the dishes, there were other reasons why these were chosen. For example, one wanted to get into a school but couldn’t make it, and so they wanted to eat the food that the school offered.

However, Kazakiri didn’t seem to have these thoughts. She shook her head and said,

“…That…that’s…because I haven’t eaten…this kind of meal before…”

“Oh? Your school never provided you with meals ever since young?”

“Erm…yeah.”

For some reason, Kazakiri looked guilty, and right now, Kamijou was thinking…

(She never had a diet lunch, so that means that she had bentos for lunch all the while? In other words, it’s not that she made her own bento, but that her dorm

provides bentos? I'm so envious, I want a bento for lunch as well. No need to fight with others over food, I can eat in a refined manner. Hai, that dorm of mine doesn't provide breakfast nor bentos for lunch. Hold on, don't I have someone who's eating free meals at home? If I ask Index to make a bento…nonono, don't even think about that, how can that girl even cook when she can't even use a microwave?)

"Hehhehhehhehhehheh…"

Kamijou showed a sinister smile, releasing negative energy at the same time.

"…Erm…may I know…why…are your eyes so terrifying…"

"Hyouka, this is Touma's old habit. Just forgive him with regards to this, please?"

Part 3

A lady in black dress was walking on a street.

Her name was Sherry Cromwell. She was a member of the Anglican anti-magic group Necessarius, and was also well versed in Kabbalah idols. She smiled as she walked through the crowd.

She had originally thought that the tattered and frilly dress of hers would attract a lot of attention, but unexpectedly, the students didn't really react much. In this city, it seemed like age factors were a lot more obvious than clothing. As 80% of the population here were students, it was rare to find anyone above 25, and a Gothic girl like her being here wasn't rare.

"—Originally as dirt—"

Sherry walked along and recited, seemingly muttering to herself.

She pulled out something similar to white chalk from her tattered sleeve. It was

an oil pastel that was meant to draw a magic array, made from Holy salt and oil.

“—God shaped the Earth, gave Life to it, and named them humans—”

Sherry sang as she held onto the oil pastel and drew on the vending machines beside her at a sword-draw speed, forming lines that looked like words and yet looked like lines.

“—And the mortals learnt the secrets from the mouths of the Fallen Angels—”

The road guardrail, trees on the pedestrian pathways, cleaning robots and pillars of the wind generators…Sherry’s oil pastel covered them all.

“—But the mortals couldn’t understand the Holy language, and the Fallen Angels couldn’t pass their words correctly—”

After drawing nearly 72 markings, she raised the oil pastel and drew in the air.

“—With this, the life created by human hands will end up as mulch puppets—the time has around, the stone golem with the stench of dirt, Ellis, be loyal to me till the end!”

Finally, Sherry clapped once.

The next moment.

The cracking sound similar to that of a pus bag being burst echoed throughout. It was not once or twice, but numerous. As the sound was rather soft, the students’ chatter and footsteps drowned it out, and so no one could hear it.

However, there truly was a change.

The beverage vending machines, road guardrail, trees on the pedestrian pathways, cleaning robots and pillars of the wind generators…ping-pong ball-sized objects bulged out like bubbles from a swamp from all the places that Sherry had drawn on. Her magic wasn’t limited to materials, anything in her hand could be used as a weapon.

A crack formed on the ping-pong ball’s surface, forming a horizontal crack.

Like a peeled grape, what appeared from the cracks were white muddy eyeballs.

Sherry took out a black piece of paper that was as big as a postcard.

“Automatic library. The target is this, right…Kaza…kiri…how do I pronounce this? Are the standard text of this country all pictures?”

The white oil pastel danced, quickly writing the words on the black piece of paper. Sherry didn’t really know how to read kanji, and could only process the words in her brain into a ‘picture’, and copy the ‘words’ onto the paper.

Then, Sherry flicked a finger, and the postcard-sized black paper flew out, landing on the ground like a Frisbee.

The words on the paper read: Kazakiri Hyouka.

The black paper with white wording looked like a reverse-colored pencil written piece of paper, causing the numerous eyeballs to be absorbed over.

The eyeballs gobbled up the piece of paper, ripped it and absorbed it into their mud-like bodies. Several seconds later, the black piece of paper disappeared.

The numerous eyeballs that ate up the scraps of paper scattered away like a crowd of cockroaches, moving in all directions. Some moved along the floor, some dove underground, all the eyeballs were moving.

“Don’t make me wait too long, Ellis.”

Sherry smiled as she said this, and disappeared into the crowd.

Part 4

After finishing their meal, the Kamijou trio walked out of the shop.

Index recalled the taste of eating a diet lunch for once and tilted her head as she said,

“It’s not unpalatable, but not really good. Mm, how should I describe it? My chest feels a bit weird, there seems to remain a bit of dissatisfaction…”

“These are dishes that were designed for everyday, it’s more important that people don’t get sick of eating it instead of whether it’s delicious. If one’s to eat a deluxe meal everyday, anyone will want to puke after one week already, right?”

Index placed her thumb under her chin and looked up. She pondered for a while and then said,

“If it’s a deluxe meal, it’s also good to eat till I puke.”

“…I understand, I understand.”

Kamijou answered in self-defeat.

It was now 1 plus in the afternoon, and right now, the surface should be a scorching hell. It was thanks to the air-conditioning that the underground street was at a temperature suitable for humans. He definitely didn’t want to leave the underground before the sun set.

Kazakiri Hyouka noticed their looks, and cautiously asked,

“…Erm…excuse me…then…where’re we going to play next…?”

There was not a hint of respect in the tone, so it seemed like she was talking to Index.

“I don’t know either. Touma, is there somewhere nice to play?”

To Index, just being in the underground street was already something new to her. Since she didn’t feel a sense of dissatisfaction, she decided to give Kamijou the lead.

“Mm…if it’s the underground street, there’s only the video arcade.”

Most of the gaming lands in Academy City were gathered underground, most likely to prevent noise from spreading outside.

Kamijou thought this as he headed outside, and just so passed through the entrance of a video arcade.

The electronic sounds rushed out of the shop like a flood, stunning Index.

“WAH! WAH! What’s that? They have so many TVs inside!”

“Oh, that isn’t a TV…alright, that is. I’ll lose if I go serious. That’s a TV, a TV.”

“Erm…I have to say…this ‘close-one-eye’ method is a little…”

Basically, the video arcade shops in Academy City could be classified under two types.

‘External shop’ and ‘internal shop’.

The game consoles of the external shops were imported from outside Academy City, and the internal shops specialized in games developed by Academy City.

Academy City’s technology was 20, 30 years more advanced than the outside world, this was apparent from the gaming consoles. However, since the companies from the outside world couldn’t match Academy City’s advanced technology (since the technology was not released to the outside world), it was easy to have inadequate software when Academy City released their latest games.

Kamijou and company were seeing an ‘internal shop’. It was more like an indoor playground than a video arcade. The shop included large sensor pads that were developed through the latest technology, it was basically not much different from a science exhibition.

“So…so cool! It’s all shining everywhere, and there’s DING DING noises all over the place! To…Touma! I want to go in! I want to try that walala thing!”

Being prompted by Index, the trio walked into the shop. The moment they passed the automatic door, the level of the noises increased by 2, 3 times.

There were many unique large-scale gaming platforms inside the shop. Besides the high-resolution screens and the virtual-reality games that utilized 3D goggles, there were other weird games like rail shooters that tested the ‘scaredy-

catness' of a person through pulse and brainwaves.

"What do you want to play, Index?"

Kamijou casually asked, but he didn't get a response.

Feeling puzzled, he turned around, only to see Index completely stoned, her eyes emitting a glow of happiness.

"Ah, damn it…"

Kamijou inadvertently muttered.

That abnormally excited look was like the time when she had first seen the calico cat. Index forcefully turned her head around and said to Kamijou,

"All of them! I want to play all of them! Touma, Touma! That first!"

Unable to wait any longer, Index tugged forcefully at Kamijou's wrist as she moved forward. The target was similar to those bumper cars in the oval stadiums, it was just that the bumper cars were replaced with walking robots that had two legs below the chair.

In this scenario, Index was invincible.

Kamijou was worried about his wallet as he sighed deeply. Coincidentally turning around to look, Kazakiri gave a smile of compassion and pity.

Part 5

"HAHA! Hm, this Kamijou Touma. To think that Tsukuyomi-sensei's class actually has such interesting students, I'm so envious! My class has only elite students, it's so boring!"

After class in the empty teachers' lounge, Yomikawa Aiho laughed heartily.

Leaving her black hair tied behind her head, Yomikawa Aiho had the sexy allure of a mature adult. Just wearing a strict looking grey suit made her look like an English teacher in an A film. It was too bad that her subject was PE that she was always wearing a green sports jacket. In all sorts of way, there was always an imperfection.

Yomikawa placed both hands on her hips and lifted her chest that was bigger than Komoe-sensei, and said,

“Speaking of which, to actually bring a girl from outside, that sure looks interesting! Those brats in my class wouldn’t even think of doing such a thing. If I could have such a person, I'd love that person without any reservations.”

On a side note, she was a member of Anti-Skill, and her ‘love’ more or less encompassed violence that an old generation PE teacher would execute. Even though her philosophy was ‘not to use weapons against students, even if they were Level 4’, when there was a berserking esper, she would recklessly mobilize all sorts of special material helmet or enhanced transparent plastic riot shield that riot forces use and slam it hard. As she herself said, “This is a tool of defense, so it’s alright”. Because of that, her nickname was ‘the woman who uses a comical way to solve a tragedy’.

On hearing this, Komoe-sensei, who promoted peace, stared at the violent teacher in front of her soullessly, and said,

“What, someone outside comes running into our school, shouldn’t Anti-Skill bear some responsibility? What would happen if it were dangerous people who came in instead of those children? And don’t you dare do anything bad to Kamijou! It’ll be troublesome if you continue to hit him on the head and make him so idiotic that it’s irreparable.”

“Ah, alright, alright, I was only joking. Either way, I know the difference between a good fool and a bad fool. Really, your personality hasn’t changed at all, always speaking up for your own students.”

“I…I’m not speaking up for my own students! I just feel that, as a teacher, since the parents have sent their precious children to me…!”

“Alright alright, don’t cry already. Seems like you’re going to cry out a mess at their graduation ceremony.”

“Uuu…uuuuu! What…what has it got to do with crying! My tears always come out every year, I can’t do anything about it!”

“Haha! Here, here.”

Yomikawa patted Komoe-sensei’s head, and Komoe-sensei swung her arms forcefully to push Yomikawa’s hand away.

“Oh yes, sensei. Didn’t you mention that there were two outsiders who came in?”

On hearing Yomikawa’s words, Komoe-sensei was stunned for a while.

Recently, many schools had installed surveillance cameras near school grounds. If there were any suspicious people around, it was rather normal for them to be investigated.

However, Komoe-sensei had already reported to the other teachers in the teachers’ lounge that there was no need to investigate Index further. That white nun had had quite a few meetings with Komoe-sensei, so she was not considered an ‘outsider’, and there was something awkward about saying it out.

“What’s the problem—?”

“Nothing, I just want to check, is it really two people?”

“???”

Just as Komoe-sensei was wondering about this puzzling question and tilting her head, a knocking on the door could be heard, followed by the door opening. Yomikawa closed one eye and said,

“This is a bit problematic, so please keep it from the students for now. I’ll talk about the details next time. Mm, just so happened to have not enough time now.”

“Ah, you have something to deal with now?”

“Oh, this is to be kept a secret from the students. Well, it’s Anti-Skill work. Later on, we’ll be heading out to hunt a huge prey. For this, I’ve got to take a walk underground. Bye bye.”

After saying that, Yomikawa exited the room, passing by the female student who entered the teachers' lounge.

Komoe-sensei was puzzled as she recalled this for a while, and then turned over to focus on the student.

"I brought the thing back."

"Ah, Himegami! Sorry to bother you."

In the empty lounge, Komoe-sensei, who was sitting on the chair, waved her arms happily.

It was the opening ceremony today, and so school was dismissed at noon. Right now, the only ones in school were the students involved in club programs and teachers in charge of providing consultation. Komoe-sensei was an exception, she was staying behind in school to help her friend finish a report.

(Only the school has the teaching staff's specialized access use 'Level B' connection, how troublesome. If my house had connection, it would be a lot more convenient for me to work.)

There were different levels of networking in Academy City, and the amount of information each level could get was different. To someone who wished to work from home, it wasn't something that she would be rather happy about.

"I'm really sorry—I shouldn't be asking students to do this, but sensei really can't get away—"

"It's alright. But it's this book right? I found a large number of specialized books in the room, and they all looked the same, so I couldn't be certain."

"Mm, mm, it's this book alright."

Komoe-sensei received the thick leather cover book that Himegami brought over and placed her hand on her face as she dawdled. The cover had large gold words 'AIM diffusion fields and their possibilities' on it.

"AIM…what is that?"

“Hahaha, you asked the same question that Kamijou asked.”

Komoe-sensei said happily,

“An AIM diffusion field refers to the weak energy that an esper involuntarily produces in all aspects.”

Himegami remained silent.

Involuntarily giving off an energy, Himegami’s ‘presence that attracts vampires’ was probably considered one of those.

Komoe-sensei didn’t notice the delicately frozen expression on Himegami’s face as she leaned back onto her chair.

“Ah…Himegami, I’m sorry for what happened today. Sensei wanted to lecture that Kamijou who skipped through the opening ceremony and had to get another teacher to host the homeroom lesson. You must have felt uneasy with being tossed into a place full of classmates that you’re unfamiliar with, right?”

“There’s no problem, no need to worry at all. Oh yeah, what did Kamijou Touma do?”

“Speaking of which, Himegami, sensei must say this to you. To sensei, if Kamijou just went off to look for that nun, at least it can be excused, but to think that he would bring another girl into the school as well, and even talk with her in the cafeteria.”

On hearing the phrase ‘another girl’, Himegami’s eyes became sharp.

The image of the girl who was standing together with Index at the school gate appeared in her mind.

“Excuse me, how does the girl look like?”

“You’re mindful of it? Oh hoho.”

Himegami responded with silence, and Komoe-sensei’s smile inadvertently froze. She then said,

“Erm…mm, the biggest features are the spectacles that always slide down and the long handful of hair popping out from beside her ears. Also, her uniform’s different from ours; it’s a short-sleeved blouse with a red tie to match the dark blue skirt. She seems like a fine girl, always facing everything around her carefully, it’s this sort of a feeling.”

After hearing this, Himegami sunk into deep thoughts alone.

What’s that girl’s name?

“Komoe-sensei?”

“Ah, what is it?”

“Do we have a student called Kazakiri Hyouka here?”

Part 6

They had already spent 8,000 yen just by making a round of the shops.

“Ho…ah, so interesting. I’m satisfied already, Touma.”

“…Ah, Mr Kamijou’s all satisfied as well. Oi, calico cat, we’ll eat bread crusts for our meals from today onwards, is that alright?”

Kamijou said wearily. Like a snake, the calico cat let out a ‘woah! Meow!’ threatening cry as he refused this proposal.

“Touma, Touma, what will we play next?”

“…Let me rest for a while.”

“Touma, how about another round?”

“PLEASE DON’T! I’LL GO BANKRUPT FOR SURE!”

Kamijou cried out in agony.

At this moment, as if grabbing the opportune time, Kamijou's cell phone let out a voice breaking hoarse ringing. It was not because the features weren't adequate, but because he had mistreated it badly in the past, causing the speakers to have some problems. However, to this Kamijou who passed through such a joyous summer, it was a miracle that the cell phone still worked.

Kamijou picked up his phone and looked, it seemed to be a phone call instead of a message. The screen displayed a number that he had never seen before. He turned his back on Index and Kazakiri and pressed the button on the cell phone. Seeing this, the acutely sharp Kazakiri said,

"…How about…we go get a drink?"

"Hm? Then let's get Touma along…"

"We'll buy his at the same time…"

After saying that, Kazakiri grabbed Index's hand and left Kamijou. Kamijou raised his empty hand, gently gave a 'thank you' hand signal, and used his other hand to agilely reach inside his wallet, take out some spare change and toss it at Kazakiri. Kazakiri was somewhat shocked by this as she frantically reached out to receive it.

After seeing both of them leave, Kamijou focused on his cell phone.

Unexpectedly, even though he specially created a space when Index and Kazakiri weren't around, the noise within the cell phone was rather serious, he couldn't hear clearly at all.

"…pssstt…hello…hello…bssssttt…hear…bssttt…this is Hime…bssttt…"

And also, this was the inside of a video arcade, there were electronic sounds overpowering everything else.

"…bssttt…where's…bssssttt…Ka…Hyouka…? Bssttt…I heard…bssttt…incredi…bssttt…bbbsssssssttttt!"

Hua! The call suddenly cut off.

He could barely hear that it was the voice of a female, but he couldn't hear the contents. Though the voice seemed somewhat familiar, there was too much excessive noise, so he couldn't tell.

"Can't be helped. This is an underground street…"

There were cell phone communication centers in the underground, but once he was too far away from it, he wouldn't be able to receive the signal.

"What's going on?"

Feeling puzzled, Kamijou folded his cell phone back together and put it back into his pocket.

"Touma's not scary at all."

Inside the vending machine and smoking area deep inside the arcade, Index said this. Kazakiri Hyouka stared back at her through the spectacles, and replied,

"…Eh?"

"So Hyouka doesn't need to be so afraid. Touma won't do anything bad to you."

"Ah…mm."

Kazakiri slightly lowered her head and said,

"…It's not…that I'm…afraid or hate him…no…"

"???"

"…I don't really understand myself…it's like…I don't dare to touch…a woolen sweater with lots of static electricity gathered on it…"

"Oh…"

Index blankly nodded her head. In all truthfulness, she didn't understand what static electricity was. Seeing Index reveal such a puzzled look, Kazakiri said,

"…Maybe this is because…this is…my first time talking to a guy…"

After that, both of them remained silent for a while.

After a while, Kazakiri changed the topic and said,

“Speaking of which…those games were really interesting…I saw you being quite happy…”

“You too, Hyouka. Do you come here often?”

“No…this is my first time as well.”

Kazakiri forced a smile, pulled out some 100-yen coins and placed them on her palm.

“What…do you want to buy?”

“Uu…I don’t want to touch a vending machine again. I’ve no idea of how to use that thing properly. You do it, Hyouka.”

Index puffed her cheeks as she said this, and Kazakiri forced a smile. Seemed like the incident involving the school cafeteria’s coupon vending machine had affected her really badly.

“…This is my first time…I don’t know what’s nicer…I’ll press, you choose.”

“Eh, Hyouka, you never drank before?”

Index casually asked. Index didn’t have any knowledge regarding modern times at all, so she didn’t understand what was wrong with it.

And Kazakiri Hyouka again said in a tone that was no different from before,

“Mm, today’s my first time.”

Part 7

Who in the world called? Kamijou pondered over that question for quite a while. However, he suddenly remembered, even after so long, Index and Kazakiri weren't back yet?

(Don't tell me…they got lost?)

Based on common knowledge, the possibility wasn't great, but thinking about it calmly, common sense didn't really apply to Index and Kazakiri. For assurance, Kamijou decided to look for both of them.

"Oi—! Index! Kazakiri!"

Kamijou looked around and headed inside the shop. All the gaming platforms inside the arcade were rather huge, almost as big as a car, and these would form plenty of blind spots when arranged. He peered into the gaps between the large gaming platforms as he moved around. Even though he would occasionally be stared at by students who were queuing up, he ignored them as he continued to look.

Soon, he arrived at a rest area. There were three vending machines there.

(Eh? Didn't Kazakiri say that she wanted to buy some drinks…? Did she miss it along the way?)

Kamijou brought a slightly puzzled look as he looked around.

At that moment, 5 girls dressed in bunny suits passed by Kamijou.

"What?"

This scene shocked Kamijou. The bunny girls casually walked into the shop, and after a while, they were all gathered at a rather old sticker photo taker, smiling as they took the photo.

(???That…what was that? Does this shop provide this clothing service?)

Looking closely, the bunny suits that the girls were wearing had many butterfly knots and shoulder decorations. Though he hadn't seen it before, it should be of some anime figurine. From the original concept of design and the large amount of skin exposed, it seemed to be a certain female character from a shoujo anime.

Anyway, the most important thing was that they were happy. Thinking about this, Kamijou wanted to look away. Index and Kazakiri didn't seem to be around here either. Kamijou thus turned around and decided to check the exit or counter, however…

Suddenly, he could hear the familiar female voices.

"…Erm…well…may I check again…are we really wearing this…?"

"We have to, we have to! WAH, so cool! They have Magical Powered Kanamin clothing!"

"Are you…really going…to wear that?"

Those were definitely Index and Kazakiri's voices. Where? Where were they? Kamijou frantically moved his head as he looked around. The voices seemed to come from the other side of the three vending machines.

Kamijou frowned as he moved to the rear of the vending machines. There was a changing room surrounded by a curtain behind the vending machines. The bar hanging the curtain was tilted, and the cloth was a little dirty, it seemed like this wasn't a well-maintained facility.

The voice came from inside.

"But this is too small, I can't wear it. Are all these clothes for babies to wear?"

"Ah, about that…if you adjust the slider near the waist…you should be able to change the size."

"Eh? Ah…WAHH! HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? THE CLOTHES JUST EXPANDED!"

"Eh…it shouldn't be made by some shape memory alloy…but air. The fibers used to make the cloth are tube-like, so letting air in will cause the fibers to expand, allowing easy adjustments to the sizing…that should be the way how this works…"

(Eh, hold on, I seem to have seen something similar before.)

Kamijou's basic instincts caused him to search his memory. There seemed to have been something similar in the school's infirmary. Yes, very similar. When he had gone to look for Index who went missing for so long, he had opened the door to look; only to see her exposed. Kamijou arrived in front of the changing room and stood in front of the curtain. The people inside should be Index and Kazakiri alright, but he was a little worried that he may get the wrong person. Kamijou carefully asked,

"Are you inside, Index?"

The next moment, there were short prompting sounds of 'YAH!' and 'AHH!'; it was as if someone had poured ice inside their clothes.

"To…Totototototouma! Why are you outside?"

"Erm…ah…if you open it now, I'll be very troubled…really troubled!"

The voices sounded anxious. Even though they were separated by a curtain, any girl would be anxious about suddenly hearing a guy's voice while they were changing. Even Kazakiri, who was only as audible as a mosquito, was screaming. Seemed like she was completely naked now.

"OK, this Kamijou won't repeat the same mistake he made at the infirmary! I will definitely not pull the curtain aside, and will not trip inside. I get it, I get it, anyway, Mr Kamijou will leave this place for now."

"Ah, mm, okay, see you later, Touma."

"…Erm…if possible…please don't look at me…even after I changed clothes…"

On hearing their voices, Kamijou slowly backed away, maintaining a distance of about 3m from the curtain. There was no anomaly. The curtain of the changing room was like a bronze wall protecting Index and Kazakiri. Very good, very good, nothing happened. Just as Kamijou relaxed and was about to turn away…

PA!

Without warning, the curtain suddenly collapsed.

"Eh…?"

As the slanted bar had been roughly abused for a long time, the curtain wasn’t hooked tightly. Like a deluxe shopping item that was covered finally being revealed, the entire changing room was exposed.

The next moment, all the voices inside Kamijou’s head vanished.

The two girls froze.

Index was wearing the Magical Powered Kanamin clothing that she had seen broadcasted yesterday. The white-based clothing looked fluffy.

The problem though was that her skirt wasn't buttoned, and there were some parts that were exposed, only that they couldn't be written here.

Kazakiri Hyouka was even worse off. She had chosen the clothing of the female antagonist (who would end up joining the protagonist midway through the series)…no, thinking about it, it was most likely a forced choice. The most problematic thing was that it was no different from a blank bikini, a sexy armor that didn't look like it had any defensive capabilities (though there was a detachable skirt underneath, the front of the skirt was split in half, so it had no significance other than being a decoration). As there was a need to show lots of skin, it seemed like she couldn't wear any underwear underneath. At that moment, she hadn't yet buttoned her breastplate up, and she was frozen like that while bending herself down until her bottom armor was pulled to a delicate position.

After several seconds of eternal silence, time finally started again.

Index bared her fangs, her eyes letting out killing intent. In contrast, Kazakiri was blushing and trembling, her eyes looking like she was about to cry.

"Erm, hold…hold on a minute! This is preposterous! Alright, let's calm down and analyze this. I was 3m away from the changing room, so my hand can't touch it, and I don't have an esper ability to pull down the curtain, so this isn't my fault…sort of…right…"

"Touma, you're looking here when the curtain dropped, right?"

"It…it wouldn't be so bad…if…you had looked away."

Kazakiri still was giving an embarrassed look even when tears were forming in her eyes, this was interesting. Kamijou thought as he tried to escape from reality.

"Erm, in other words, are we still doing that, Miss Index?"

Index nodded her head as she buttoned up, and said,

“It’s useless to talk further, Touma.”

At the far end of his consciousness, there were the sounds of girls laughing.

“A photo taker…Hyouka, Hyouka! How do you use this machine?”

“Erm…you slot the coin in…and press the button, it’ll start taking in 5 minutes…”

“Oo…Hyouka, why do you look so down? Is there anything bothering you?”

“Erm…well…do we really have to take this? I…eh…ah, please wait! Don’t press the button! I…I’m still…”

“We’re taking it! Don’t move, Hyouka, or your face will be all weird!”

“Ah…uuu…please listen to me…”

And on the other side, in a dark corner 3m away from this joyous scene, Kamijou was sprawled on the floor like a torn rag cloth.

Part 8

Having changed back into their usual clothing, Index and Kazakiri’s moods were completely different. Index was jumping around in excitement after seeing the huge poster, and Kazakiri was in complete despair, with the depressive sound effect of a New Year’s Eve bell. Being seen naked and having an embarrassing photo taken, that double whammy was quite a hit to her.

“Here, Hyouka, each one takes half.”

Index didn’t care about Kazakiri’s response as she folded the group of 16 photo stickers in half along the fold crease, and handed 8 of them to Kazakiri. To Kazakiri, the photos of her were so embarrassing that she wanted to slam her head against the wall and die. However, she also wanted to treasure the photos

that she took together with her friend like a precious gift; her face revealing a complicated expression.

“It sure feels like a day passed by really quickly.”

Index stared at the half portion of photo stickers that she had, and lamented,

“Is this school life? Hm…so good.”

“No no no. School is never fun. School is boring classes and hellish exams."

Truthfully, having lost his memory, Kamijou didn’t remember anything, but he still managed to say it in a convincing manner.

Index showed a delighted look to Kamijou, and said,

“Being able to think that such a life is boring is already a blessing.”

“…You’re right.”

After thinking for a while, Kamijou nodded his head.

The world that Index originally lived in was completely different from the world that Kamijou lived in, this was undeniable. Though it was unknown whether that world had school education, any future planning like ‘getting into a good school and getting a good job in a good company’ was probably just daydreaming.

To her, an ordinary school life was like a treasure that she could never ever get. Among it contained a peaceful world without war, and the warm times that were criticized as boring.

If they continued to stay inside the playground, the coins would continue to disappear at an amazingly fast rate, so Kamijou and the rest decided to move out first.

It had been a while since they had walked into the shop, but the warmth of the underground street didn’t look like it was going to subside anytime soon. However, there was gradually an increase in number of students wearing plainclothes as compared to uniforms as they were walking on the path. Seemed like they went back to their dorms before coming back out to play. There was no

sunlight in the underground street, and the lights were always set at a certain brightness, so they could only use that to experience the passing of time. In order to prevent themselves from blocking other people's path, Kamijou leaned against the wall as he talked to Index and Kazakiri. At that moment, a high school student-looking girl ran past them. The girl was wearing a Judgment armband.

"…hm?"

Kamijou casually looked away, only to find the Judgment member stopping and glaring at him. Kamijou was shocked as the girl angrily stormed forward at him in large steps.

Then, the girl mightily stood right in front of Kamijou, and said,

"Hey, how many times have I told you already? Why are you still standing around casually? Hurry up and escape! HURRY!"

Suddenly being scolded, not just Kamijou, even Index and Kazakiri were shocked.

(Eh…hold on, did she talk to me just now?)

The first thing that this stranger said to him made Kamijou all confused. On seeing this, the Judgment member frowned and said,

"Telepathy! Couldn't you hear it!?"

The girl was so nervous that her face was becoming red with anxiety. Index and Kazakiri let out a 'WAH!' and 'KYAH!' at the same time. Both of them frantically looked around, saying,

"Ah…that's strange…I seemed to have heard…it came from nowhere…"

"Uu…I seemed to have heard a voice in my mind…"

Index and Kazakiri let out an incredulous look, with Kamijou being the only one with no response at all.

"Ah…telepathy, it's that ability to talk to others from far away, right? Komoe-sensei seemed to have said it before during remedial that there are many types of

information transfer abilities, like reading body currents, hearing low frequency sounds from outside a domain…but this is like a wired telephone, isn't it?"

Kamijou raised his right hand and placed it in front of Index, and Index revealed a surprised look. Seemed like the telepathy ability was cut off, so Index couldn't hear the 'voice' in her mind.

A wired call.

Like what the name implied, it manipulated air vibration to create a frequency, an invisible 'wire'. That was also one of the information transfer abilities. The 'wire' was like an acoustic tube, able to pass the vibrations created by the 'sound', and passing it out through a 'connected circuit' in mid-air, ending up with the ones standing at the exit being the only ones able to hear it. As the 'wire' was invisible, Kamijou didn't understand the path, but it was likely that Kamijou's right hand touched the telepathy 'wire' between him and the girl, so only Kamijou couldn't hear it.

"Speaking of which, is the research on telepathy still ongoing? Didn't I hear that with the prevalence of handphones, it's becoming obsolete together with pagers?"

"…You."

The Judgment girl was popping blue veins out of her forehead, and said,

"Why can't my 'voice' reach you? Never mind, I'll just say it to you then."

The girl stepped towards Kamijou.

"Eh?"

"Right now, there're terrorists in this underground street. A red alert was issued from above, and the arrest operation shall start in…902 seconds. At that time, we'll lower the separation wall and seal off the entire underground street, and there'll be a gunfight. Thus, I was ordered to instruct everyone to escape as soon as possible, do you understand me now?"

On hearing that, Kamijou couldn't help but be shocked.

Index didn't understand what a red alert was at all, and though Kazakiri did, she was revealing a look of utter disbelief, and both of them could only stand around blankly after hearing the Judgment member's words.

"If the terrorist knows of the arrest operation, the terrorist may try to escape, so we can't broadcast it outside, and can only use my telepathy. You people also need to remain natural as you escape, don't make too much noise."

"Oh…giving telepathy to people other than the terrorist? Eh? So that means you people know how the terrorist looks?"

"As an ordinary civilian, you don't have to worry about this. The warrant we have has a photo, so there's no need to worry."

The Judgment member pulled out a foldable cell phone and flipped it open. The screen displayed a photo, and thinking logically, one would assume that it was the photo of the terrorist. Kamijou got close as he tried to take a look, but the girl had already folded the photo back with one hand.

"Alright, alright, since you understand, hurry up and leave. There's about 800 seconds till the sealing of the underground street."

The Judgment girl said these words before leaving.

Kamijou again looked around. The students who heard the 'voice' were obviously looking panicky, but they still followed the instructions of moving towards the exit in a natural way. However, to an outsider, it was like they were taking a stroll, doing an evacuation drill as if it was just practice.

"Oi oi, this is troublesome…let's get out of here first, Index."

There was no need to attract trouble. Kamijou decided to take Index and Kazakiri along and quickly leave the place.

However…

(…Ah, hold on, this is bad.)

While arriving in front of the staircase exit of a certain department store, Kamijou inadvertently stopped in his tracks. The two girls stared at Kamijou

suspiciously.

There were 4, 5 fully-armed male Anti-Skill member standing near the exit. They were all clad in black, wearing safety helmets and goggles on their heads, looking like robots. Each of them was holding a rifle that Kamijou had never seen before.

Index wasn't a resident of this city. Even though it was unknown who had issued her temporary ID, her real identity was still of an illegal immigrant.

If she was investigated…she may be arrested.

Normally, they wouldn't be so mindful, there was no problem for Index to walk around like an ordinary person. However, it was now an emergency, Anti-Skill had set up a checkpoint, and any suspicious personnel would be thoroughly investigated. If so, they may discover that Index was an outsider.

Truthfully, during events like the Olympics or the World Cup, due to the heightened security, even drunks who weren't affecting the operations of the event would be arrested. Right now, the security situation with Index was similar to that.

Though he didn't know who was the terrorist who had snuck in, because of this, Kamijou and company were in a dilemma now. If they were to casually approach the exit, they may be arrested by Anti-Skill, but if they were to stay in the underground street, they may end up involved in a gunfight.

(Sigh, looks like we can only move in head on. Being arrested by Anti-Skill and getting involved in a gunfight, at least the former's a bit better. Damn it, it's irritating to have to make such a rough decision.)

Though there was an element of danger to this, Kamijou decided to leave first.

However, he was unable to finish this idea.

An anomaly in this everyday life blocked his exit.

"—Found you."

They could hear a woman's voice.

The problem came from within the wall that’s empty.

Kamijou turned around, and was momentarily stunned. At approximately his eyes’ height, there was tea-colored mud that was as big as a palm. It looked like chewing gum that had been spit on the wall.

And right in the middle of the mud was a human eyeball.

The eyeball acted like a camera lens, moving continuously.

On seeing the eyeball, Kazakiri was stunned. Maybe it was because she couldn’t believe what she had just seen, she just treated it like a fake eyeball that was made of glass. Truthfully, Kamijou was almost the same. The back of his brain felt numb, making him unable to process the information in front of him.

Only Index didn’t seem to be surprised, as she inspected the eyeball calmly.

The surface of the mud trembled slightly like ripples, making a ‘sound’.

“Hoho…hohoho… hohohohoho. The Index, Imagine Breaker, key to the Imaginary Number District. Which should I choose? I can choose anyone of them? Hoho, how troublesome. Too many options can also be quite a bother.”

The woman’s voice was rather bewitching, yet ridiculously heavy, such that it made one think of a songstress who's vocal cords were damaged from smoking.

But that dispirited tone suddenly changed drastically.

“—Never mind, I just need to kill you all anyway.”

It became an overly rough voice even if it was from a pub in the suburbs.

Kamijou was unable to tell where the mysterious invader was, and he had no idea whether the mysterious block of mud was of esper power or magic.

But Index said without hesitation,

“A human image that’s made from dirt—this spell that’s interpreted from the Kabbalah is similar to those that we Anglicans use, especially the Jewish guardian stone golem that was forced to be a guardian angel of England.”

Facing Index’s sudden change, Kamijou was unable to respond quickly. Even though he was about to ask her for an explanation, he didn’t understand anything at all.

So, Kamijou decided to ask this first.

“Stone golem…you mean this eyeball?”

He inadvertently pointed towards the mud and eyeball that was on the wall. Though he wanted to puke at such a disgusting thing, at least it was not life-threatening. Besides, in Kamijou’s mind, a ‘stone golem’ was one of those huge stupid stone puppets that appeared in games.

However, Index continued to stare at the eyeball, and said,

“It was said that God created humans through dirt. The stone golem is the end

product of this theory. This magician must have created a stone golem that focuses on the eyeballs in order to search and monitor. Normally, the caster can only create one such stone golem, but if there's only one eyeball, the composition to create a stone golem will drastically decrease, allowing the caster to create even more of it."

After Index finished, the eyeball started to shake the surface and let out a bewitching laugh.

Kamijou didn't understand the secret behind this, but at least he managed to understand that the mud and eyeball were like a remote control, there was someone controlling it.

"If so…this magician is the terrorist?"

"Hoho."

The mud laughed.

"A terrorist? A terrorist!? Hoho, this so-called terrorist, are you talking about someone who does this?"

PAM! With this sound, the mud and eyeball exploded, melted into the wall and disappeared.

The next moment,

BOOM! The entire underground street trembled violently.

"What…?"

Kamijou felt like he was sitting on a boat in the midst of a storm as he started to tumble around. From the corner of his vision, he saw Kazakiri holding tightly onto Index, who almost fell down.

The tremendous tremor again struck the underground street as if it had been hit by a direct cannon hit. The center of the attack seemed to be far away, but it instantly spread throughout the entire underground.

Copious amounts of dust scattered down from the ceiling.

After the lights flicker twice, all the lights disappeared at the same time. Several seconds later, the emergency red lights were lit, vaguely illuminating the surroundings.

The crowd that had been slowly walking towards the exit as if it were an evacuation drill instantly collapsed into chaos. The sound of wild bull-like footsteps could be heard.

After that, a low, heavy sound echoed throughout.

Anti-Skill lowered the separation wall a lot sooner than expected.

It was unknown why the separation wall was abnormally thick, maybe it was used to prevent flooding in the underground street during a flood, or maybe it was meant to be an air-raid shelter. The steel doors descended down from the ceiling, slowly sealing the exit. The rear end of the escaping crowd got cut off, and the separation wall touched the floor just like that. The students that were nearly crushed and the students that didn't manage to escape were in a frenzy as they continued to hit the thick and heavy steel wall. Some of them rushed over to the Anti-Skill personnel who were at the checkpoint.

They were shut in.

The crowd was squeezed in at the narrow exit, forming a human wall, so Kamijou and company were unable to get near. If this situation was already anticipated by the enemy, it seemed like the enemy had already confirmed Kamijou and company's location, the layout and the crowd flow. Had the enemy collected all this information through the mud eyeballs scattered all over the place?

"Come on, let the party begin—"

From the corroded mud, a woman's voice could be heard. It was like a pre-mortem cry made by the 'destroyed eye', yet also sounds like a broken trumpet.

"—continue to scream in this foul smelling grave of dirt."

Again, a larger impact shook the entire underground street.

Part 9

Not giving up, Kamijou tried to look for another exit, but it was useless. The stairs and elevator were sealed off by the wall, and the air vents weren't large enough for people to pass through.

The temperature underground started to rise, maybe because the air-conditioning system wasn't working any longer. Under the shining emergency red lights, the entire underground seemed like it had become an oven. He knew that it was a psychological effect, but there was the feeling of air becoming less. The uneasy feeling of being buried in a large space continued to build up within his heart.

Kamijou stared at the far end of the dark corridor, gritted his teeth, and said,

"…The one who attacked us seems to be clear about our appearances, seems like we can only fight back. Index, go find a place to hide with Kazakiri."

The enemy knew where they were. Though the enclosed space was spacious, once the enemy did a thorough search, they would be found out no matter where they hid.

The enemy's objective was to kill all three of them, and there was no way to escape. There was only one thing to do.

(Before the enemy can attack Kazakiri, I have to take the initiative and fight back. Damn it, if I knew how many enemies there are, at least I could come up with some sort of strategy…)

Just as Kamijou was thinking about this, Index, who was carrying the calico cat, puffed her cheeks and said,

"Touma, you should go ahead and hide with Hyouka. Since the enemy's a magician, I should handle this."

"Idiot, you're so skinny and frail, how can you fight? If you punch someone with your fist, the one likely to be injured is your own fist. Enough talk, hurry up and go hide with Kazakiri."

“Humph, Touma. Did you think that those past lucky breaks of yours were of your own ability? Even if you have an inexplicable power, you’re still an amateur to magic. Since you’re an amateur, you should go and hide with Hyouka.”

“HA! What nonsense are you spouting!? This Kamijou is the incarnate of misfortune, there’s no such thing as being lucky in my dictionary…uu, I made myself unhappy by saying that.”

At that moment, Kazakiri timidly asked the boy who was wallowing in extreme self-inferiority,

“…Excuse me…I don’t know what’s going on…but…is there an option involving me helping out…?”

“None.”

Kamijou and Index immediately responded in unison. Kazakiri lowered her head dejectedly.

At that moment, the sound of footsteps could be heard nearby.

“…”

Kamijou rushed forward, intending to protect Index and Kazakiri, and Index rushed forward to protect Kamijou and Kazakiri—in the end, both Kamijou and Index crashed into each other and fell to the ground. Only Kazakiri was left standing , not hurt at all, timidly putting both hands in front of her and not daring to do anything. The footsteps were approaching closer, and the calico cat that was almost being flattened in Index’s chest purred, struggling by moving its front paws.

Clack, clack, clack…the footsteps echoed like an old mechanical clock.

From the other side of the corner, there was the voice of a girl.

“Eh? There seems to be a cat meowing.”

“Aren’t you not interested in animals, Kuroko?”

“Onee-sama’s unexpectedly interested in them though.”

“I…I’m not…”

“Ho, you can’t fool my eyes. Onee-sama will go off to feed the stray cats that gather behind the dorm. The problem is that onee-sama’s body always gives off weak static electricity, causing the stray cats to run away, leaving onee-sama alone with the can of cat food in her hand.”

“How did you…? Kuroko! Were you tailing me!?”

The two girls who had appeared from around the corner saw Kamijou and Index on the floor, and stopped. These two people—Misaka Mikoto and Shirai Kuroko were definitely not enemies.

I got worried over nothing…Kamijou thought as he relaxed his body, his entire body collapsed onto the floor. Mikoto stared at him with an intrigued look, and asked,

“Why are you here? Why are you tripped by a girl in this situation?”

“…Ara ara, so daring, in broad daylight.”

Shirai coldly remarked. For some reason, Mikoto started to let out sparks from her bangs.

On seeing the two girls, Index still had no intention of getting up from Kamijou, and said,

“Touma, who’re these two classless women? Do you know them? What’s their relationship with you? That short hair looks like that ice queen I met the last time, are they the same person?”

“What…”

On hearing this, Shirai was utterly speechless. In response to Index, who was clearly taunting them, Mikoto revealed a seemingly friendly but dangerous smile.

(Ah…speaking of which, Index did meet Misaka Imouto before.)

Trying to escape from reality, Kamijou thought.

(Eh? But why is it that the atmosphere between these people's rather explosive?)

After a long while, Kamijou dared to drag his thoughts back to reality.

Index and Mikoto exchanged looks.

"From the looks of things, are you Touma's friend?"

"Sort of…? Hold on, then you're also…?"

"…Eh, don't tell me Touma's your saviour?"

"Ah…don't tell me you're another 'I didn't ask to be saved but he saved me anyway'?"

"…"

Both of them remained silent for a while, and then sighed. Kamijou was happily thinking that the tense atmosphere between those two had been resolved, only to hear them shout at the same time,

"TOUMA (YOU)!! WHAT ELSE WERE YOU DOING BEHIND MY BACK!?"

They had actually turned from being enemies to having a common enemy.

"WAAAHH!!"

Kamijou quickly closed his originally opened heart.

Seeing Kamijou bombed from two sides, Kazakiri couldn't help but cover her wide open mouth.

Though she felt that Kamijou was rather pitiful, she didn't dare to enter the battlefield. Kazakiri guiltily looked around for a while before finally spotting Shirai Kuroko, who was one step away from them. She decided to muster up courage and ask the only neutral party to mediate; but on closer look, Shirai Kuroko seemed to be muttering to herself.

“(…Really, what savior? I already noticed that something’s amiss, that day this boy came to onee-sama’s room, something definitely happened. However, does this mean that onee-sama, who doesn’t tell me anything, would tell all her secrets to him? Hoho, really interesting, hohohohoho.)”

Hearing this terrifyingly calm muttering, the spectacles on Kazakiri’s face slid down even lower.

So the twin pigtailed girl wasn’t a neutral, but a third party. Isolated, Kazakiri could only stand aside, not knowing what to do. To her, barging into this complicated conflict was thoroughly impossible.

After a long lecture, Kamijou was finally let off as he crawled up from below Index. After that, he gave a brief explanation to Mikoto and Shirai. Of course, they wouldn’t believe anything about magic, so he avoided it.

“Oo…I’m a little confused here, but anyway, you got involved in something troublesome again? It’s a terrorist this time? Hm…Kuroko, speaking of terrorist, is it possibly related to that crazy woman in that gothic dress?”

Mikoto asked Shirai in helplessness.

“Yeah. According to the features of the sounds, there should be a relationship, right? However, I didn’t think that there would be an esper who would attack Academy City from the ‘outside’…of course, it’s not impossible for natural espers to exist, however…”

“Maybe there are other esper development groups other than Academy City. However, in regards to the rumors of espers ‘outside’, these are as baseless as government conspiracies.”

It seemed like since Shirai and Mikoto didn’t know about the existence of magic, they tried to explain the current scenario through espers. From the corner of his eye, Kamijou glanced at Index, who was giving an unhappy expression. In order to prevent this from getting complicated, he immediately reached his hand out to prevent her from talking.

Shirai sighed, the Judgment armband on her arm swayed slightly.

“Really, we actually let a terrorist enter. Looks like I’ve to motivate myself. I

heard that there were two groups of intruders today. One group alone created quite the commotion, I'm really worried about what the second group will do."

"Hm?"

On hearing Shirai Kuroko's words, Kamijou felt that something was not right.

"What now, Kuroko? Are there other factors that are causing problems?"

"Yeah. According to the information that I got from Anti-Skill, there are two groups of intruders. As the paths they took were completely different, it's likely that they're not the same group of people. However, we can't confirm that right now."

"Hm…?"

Shirai Kuroko's words caused Kamijou to start sweating.

Index was the first to realize that something was wrong with Kamijou as she reached out both hands to tug at Kamijou's shirt, asking,

"Touma, why is your body trembling? What's wrong?"

Mikoto smiled slightly at Index,

"Hoho…maybe he finds you to be too irritating?"

"I'M NOT IRRITATING!"

Index shouted, but Kamijou ignored them, saying to everyone,

"Erm…everyone…please don't get angry…but the other group of intruders… may be me."

Everyone present stared at Kamijou in surprise.

Kamijou skillfully avoided all the stares and said,

"Erm, it was like this, I met a foolish man called Yamisaka yesterday. In order to save his friend, I went out of Academy City and only came back this morning. In the end…erm…what? Misaka, Shirai, why are you two giving me that 'I got it, I

got it, your old habit's at it again' expression?"

Kamijou's basic instincts told him to quickly change the topic as he managed to quickly think of something and said,

"Oh yeah, why are you two here?"

"I'm a member of Judgment, I'm here to help the people who're trapped here. Don't look at me like that, I do have the Teleport ability."

"Oh, then Mikoto?"

"Me? Ah, it's nothing…"

"?"

"S…so what!? Why bother about why I'm here!?"

For some reason, Mikoto blushed as she shouted, making Kamijou confused. Standing beside Kamijou, Shirai closed one eye as she didn't even hide the slight dissatisfaction on her face, muttering to herself,

"…(Hai, onee-sama was working with me, but just so happened to spot you on the guard room's red alert surveillance camera, and came running over because she was worried. Of course it's embarrassing for her to say that.)"

Kamijou turned towards Shirai, who in turn turned her head away and ignored him.

Not understanding what games these two were playing, Kamijou started to seriously consider Shirai's Teleport ability.

Truly, as long as they used that ability, it was not hard to escape from the sealed underground street.

"As a member of Judgment, I can't just leave the terrorist alone."

Shirai glared at the far end of the dim passage, and then said,

"However, human safety is more important. If Anti-Skill's decision to lower the wall is correct, it means that we don't have much time left. There's going to be a

large scale battle here, I have to let everyone escape first.”

There were numerous students still stuck behind the wall, unable to escape. They knew that they were just wasting their effort, but they were still trying to push the steel wall aside.

“I understand, Shirai. I’ll go buy some time before you save those people who’re trapped. You just need to bring those people out.”

After saying that, Kamijou was slapped by Shirai, Mikoto and Index from three directions, all at the same time. Mikoto and Index stared at each other bitterly, the meaning seemed to have been ‘we have the same idea in regards to such a useless thing’. Only Kazakiri wanted to say something, but didn’t dare to, the hand that she had raised didn’t seem to know where it should go.

After that, Mikoto seemed to be representing everyone as she said,

“You're the one who should leave. Aren’t you people the enemy’s targets? How can we leave the people in most danger on the battlefield?”

“…The problem is…”

Kamijou scratched his head, and said,

“My right hand can negate all supernatural powers, including Shirai’s.”

“Speaking of that…that day when you came over to the girls’ dorm, I did fail once.”

Recalling this, Shirai muttered to herself. At that moment, Mikoto’s eyes became sharp. Kamijou panicked as he took a step back. Because of several circumstances, Kamijou had once entered Mikoto’s room.

“An…anyway, Shirai’s power isn’t going to take me out of here. If so, I can only stay behind and fight the enemy.”

On hearing that, Index grabbed onto Kamijou’s wrist, and said,

“Then I’m staying too!”

This time, Index was slapped by Kamijou, Mikoto, Shirai and Kazakiri at the same time. Even the frail Kazakiri mustered up courage as she closed her eyes and aimed at the back of Index's back before attacking.

Shirai then placed both hands on her hips and said,

"My power does have its limits…I can at most get two people out. If the kid's heavier than what I expected, it's another case altogether."

"Humph! Do you have any right to call me that when you're the one who most looks like a kid!?"

"What…what did you say? As a piece of washboard, you dare to be so cheeky…!"

Seeing the agitated Shirai Kuroko, Mikoto sighed, and said,

"Alright alright, is there any point in arguing about this? To me, you're all kids."

To a high school student, everyone was a kid, including Mikoto. However, Kamijou didn't say that, only showing a slight smile. This was Kamijou Touma's gentle side.

However, Kamijou didn't realize that Kazakiri, who was standing slightly further away, was now giving a 'babysitter watching over a bunch of immature brats' look at everyone else, including Kamijou.

"However, since you can send only two people at one go…bring Index and Kazakiri away first."

"Touma, you're saying that you want to stay behind with this shorthair?"

Index said in a rather calm tone. She was revealing her fangs, looking like she was ready to strike anytime and bite Kamijou's head.

"…Erm…then Mikoto and Kazakiri."

"Ho, so you're saying that you're going to stay with the brat? Hoho…"

This time, Mikoto's tea-colored hair started to float in the air due to the static

electricity. Bluish-white sparks continued to be emitted in this darkness.

“AAHHH! DAMN IT! THEN INDEX AND MIKOTO!”

Kamijou grabbed onto his head with both hands as he shouted. Shirai sighed and said,

“Alright, I’ll bring onee-sama and that brat away, I’ll be going with them.”

“What? Wouldn’t it be tiring for you to teleport here and there? Why can’t you just stay here and teleport them one by one?”

“With me around, it’s easier to make minor adjustments. If I’m to randomly teleport them out, what would happen if they’re buried inside a building? I don’t want to end up creating a weird human pillar[2]—alright, let’s go.”

As if she was rounding it off, Shirai placed both hands on Index and Mikoto’s shoulders, who were glaring at each other.

The next moment.

‘Shua!’ A sound similar to that of a bird opening its wings could be heard, as Index, Mikoto and Shirai disappeared into thin air just like that. Before they vanished, Kamijou seemed to hear Mikoto shout “EH!? WAIT, KUROKO! I WANT TO STAY!” Kamijou thought, maybe Mikoto was uneasy about leaving her kouhai Shirai alone to stay inside the battlefield and carry out her duty.

Kamijou and Kazakiri unknowingly stared towards the surface. Had they arrived at the surface safely?

“Sent those two away first…sorry to leave you for last.”

“…Ah, it’s okay…it’s okay for me to be last…as for you…”

Kazakiri was interrupted before she could finish.

BOOM! The entire ground trembled again.

But unlike before, the impact seemed to be closer. Along the dim passage, they seemed to hear sounds like the explosive sounds of gunfire, roars and screams.

(The big bad's about to arrive…why can't he wait a while longer!)

The enemy had already used the eyeballs to scan through the entire underground street, and right now, it was obvious for the enemy to come at where Kamijou and Kazakiri were.

On hearing the sounds of fighting far away, the students who were gathered beside the wall sank into commotion once again. Even with special abilities, they were just ordinary students. In order to get away as far as possible from the danger, they started to stick together and run forward. However, due to the emergency red light being too weak, one person tripped, followed by the rest in a domino-like effect.

Kamijou glared at the far end of the passage.

There was no time to slowly think.

If there was a battle in this place with numerous people gathered, there would be victims. Though Kamijou's right hand could erase all supernatural powers, he couldn't protect so many people at once.

(Since a battle's inevitable…)

Kamijou made a quick decision

"Sorry, Kazakiri, wait for Shirai to pick you up here."

"Eh? Then…what about you…?"

Before Kazakiri could finish, another tremor occurred underground. It was extremely close this time. The air leading inside seemed to be completely compressed as he could feel some wind coming at him.

The interrupting sounds of gunfire and roars seemed even clearer now. The enemy was now within close proximity.

Kamijou was not looking at Kazakiri at all, only staring at the darkness in front of him as he said,

"I'll go over…and stop that thing!"

After saying that, without waiting for Kazakiri’s response, Kamijou dashed into the darkness.

Kamijou was completely clueless about the enemy’s specialty and strength; he was trembling at the sound of battle. But if the enemy reached here, numerous lives would be lost, including Kazakiri Hyouka.

Kamijou definitely couldn’t allow that to happen.

Clenching his right fist, Kamijou sprinted madly into the darkness.

Chapter 3: Closure. *Battle_Cry.*

Part 1

In this battlefield full of gunshots and smoke, Sherry Cromwell continued to walk about elegantly.

A stone golem was standing in front of her like a large shield. After the stone golem mixed all the rubble, signage and pillars, it started to shape up like clay, its height reaching 4m tall. As it was really too tall, the head of the stone golem had to remain tilted.

She waved the white oil pastel in the air. The lines that were drawn formed commands, telling the stone golem to move forward.

There was a group of Anti-Skill personnel dressed in black armor standing in front of Sherry. They had placed coffee shop tables, sofas and other things on the path to create a road block, and were poking their heads from the road block as they continued to shoot at the stone golem. In order to give no space when they reloaded, they were grouped in trios. When one group was reloading, another group would come in; it was like Oda Nobunaga's musket corps.

(They barely pass off as decent, but there's no style.)

Sherry dully made this evaluation.

As the underground street was already so narrow, the stone golem—Ellis was blocking the entire path, acting like a wall. Not one bullet hit Sherry, who was right behind it.

Several hundred bullets hit Ellis, but none did any fatal damage. The bullets dug holes deep into Ellis' hands and legs, but Ellis could absorb the tiles from the

nearby walls to repair its damage parts.

DING! The slight sound of metal colliding could be heard.

An Anti-Skill member ran out of patience and pulled the safety pin off a grenade. In order to cause damage to Sherry, who was behind the stone golem, he wanted to toss it between the legs of the golem.

“ELLIS!”

Though before he could, Sherry raised her oil pastel and drew another line.

The stone golem raised its leg and stamped onto the ground. With a huge boom, the floor of the entire underground street flipped up heavily like a boat among giant waves. At this moment, the Anti-Skill member wanted to toss the grenade out, but with this sudden tremor, the grenade that was without the safety pin rolled out of his hand and dropped beside his feet.

A growl.

And then, an explosion.

Blood was splattered all over the place. This model of grenade didn’t seem to rely on the explosiveness, but used shrapnel to injure. Thus, the road block wasn’t blown away. There was the smell of blood beside the road block. Luckily, the people jumped out of the road block to escape the storm of sharp shrapnel and save their lives.

Most of the Anti-Skill members let go of their rifles due to the impact of the explosion.

Shua! The oil pastel ripped the air like a sword being drawn out.

A black shadow appeared above the Anti-Skill members. Ellis raised its arm that was like heavy construction machinery.

The Anti-Skill members frantically pulled out their pre-prepared handguns, but it was too late.

Such weak weapons were not going to stop the stone golem.

Part 2

This is a battlefield.

Passing a corner in the underground street, Kamijou inadvertently covered his mouth.

This was a real battlefield.

No one was battling in front of him, and there were no gunshots or growls. All he saw were injured, battered people who were ripped apart and were leaning on the pillars and walls. It wasn't the frontline, but a place similar to a hospital. The warriors who had lost and retreated from battle were treating their wounds in an impromptu manner.

These were all Anti-Skill members, numbering almost 20 of them. Every single one of them was injured badly, and it was hard to imagine what kind of monster they were facing. Band-aids and bandages were useless here. The treatment here was like using thread and needle to patch a large hole on a rag sack.

(To be able to beat Anti-Skill down like this. What kind of magician is he…)

Kamijou was flabbergasted. Even though he was an amateur who didn't know the details, at least he knew that there was the science side and the magic side in the world. Before today, he thought that both sides were equal.

However, the current reality right now was like this.

Up till now, Kamijou had faced off against numerous magicians that couldn't be underestimated, so he wouldn't underestimate a magician's capability. However, right now, he was seeing the science side that he was living in being beaten badly, and was rather shocked by it.

The people in charge of security in Academy City were as weak as the armies in those monster movies.

But even so, they didn't intend to retreat.

The people who could still move were trying to move the tables and chairs near the shops, intending to create a road block. No, the ones who couldn't move were the important ones. At this moment, Kamijou had already confirmed that they couldn't move.

These people weren't just betting on their own lives.

They had the determination of finishing this even if they died.

(Why…)

Kamijou was speechless.

These people may have been trained, but their occupations were only 'teaching staff'… or school teachers. No one forced them to do this, and their salary wasn't exceptionally high. On a whole, they had no need to risk their lives and do battle. They weren't official policemen who had passed the National Security Test. Nobody would blame them even if they were to run away and try to protect their own lives. But they were not doing this…

At this moment, an Anti-Skill member who was sitting against the wall spotted Kamijou, who was rooted at the corner. What was surprising was that this Anti-Skill member was a woman. She was taping up her injured comrade's wrist, but on seeing Kamijou, she was stunned.

"OI, THAT BOY OVER THERE! WHAT ARE YOU DOIN HERE!?"

The angry shout caused several Anti-Skill members to turn around. Kamijou didn't respond. The woman who shouted scowled impatiently and said,

"Damn it, are you that brat from Tsukuyomi-sensei's class? What's wrong? You got locked up? That's why I said not to let down the sealing wall! Boy, you ran to the wrong direction! Go to gate AO3, the Judgment members backups will be waiting over there! Though it's impossible to escape there, at least it's safer over there! Put on this helmet, at least it's better than nothing!"

Tsukuyomi was Komoe-sensei's name. In other words, this Anti-Skill woman had heard from Komoe-sensei regarding Kamijou. The female Anti-Skill member angrily took off her gear and roughly threw it at Kamijou. Kamijou frantically reached his hands out to catch the safety helmet that was passed over

like a basketball.

Kamijou again looked around.

Then, he roughly knew why these people wouldn't retreat.

Kamijou then walked further in.

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING? DAMN IT, I CAN'T MOVE MY BODY! SOMEONE GO GRAB THAT DAMNED CIVILIAN!"

The female Anti-Skill member reached her hand out, but she was rather far from Kamijou.

On hearing that, several Anti-Skill personnel rushed up to stop Kamijou, but since they were injured, they couldn't do it. Their remaining strength was such that they were unable to stop a High school student who was not even trained at all.

Even so, they were still not running away.

They were not officially policemen. No matter how much professional training they had, they were still school teachers. Their actions were like patrolmen who were standing by at the roads from school in the evening to ensure the students' safety.

But because of this, they were clear about it. Nobody had forced them to do this, so once they lost to the fear within them, they would immediately succumb. And if they succumbed, what kind of people would be hurt?

From the start, the system that Anti-Skill and Judgment used was that they didn't accept recommendations and requisitions, but volunteers.

If so, the answer was simple. These people chose to gather here because they wanted to protect the children, they weren't requested to.

(Damn it…)

Kamijou couldn't help but let this out.

He tossed aside the injured Anti-Skill member who had stepped up to stop him and continued to move forward. Inside this dark passage that was right ahead, there were many idiots like these. And from how things were going, it seemed like the situation was rather disparaging.

He tightly clenched his right hand.

Without looking away, he stared forward and dashed forward.

Even though fighting against this enemy was a suicidal act, if the enemy was a magician, there may have been a chance of turning the situation around if they used the final trump card, his right hand. Kamijou thought.

Continuing to run down the passage, Kamijou suddenly realized something.

(No…sound?)

There should be a shootout in the path deep inside, but yet it was so quiet it was terrifying. No gunfire, no footsteps, no shouts, nothing. There was not even a single tremor on the floor. A heavy bad premonition struck Kamijou's abdomen heavily.

And like bacteria on a mildew, it was gradually corroding Kamijou's body.

(Don't tell me…)

Under the red light, he dashed towards the other side of the dim passage.

"Hehe, good afternoon. Hehohohoho…"

The heavy voice of a woman speaking echoed throughout the dark space.

There was a woman with messy hair wearing a black robe, her skin as tan as chocolate, standing right in the middle of the passage. The skirt of her dress was extremely long, such that even her ankles couldn't be seen. Maybe it was because that she had dragged it for a long time that the edges of her skirt were dirty and worn out, heavily tattered. A stone golem stood beside her as if it was her shield. This was a huge puppet made by steel wires, chairs, tiles, dirt, lights and other things being crushed, mashed and shaped together by a powerful force.

And surrounding them…

The things that were supposed to be materials for the road block were crushed into pieces and scattered all over the place. As if they had been shot by a cannonball, 7 or 8 Anti-Skill members were lying on the floor together with the shrapnel. They seemed to be breathing, as their limbs were still trembling.

“Hoho, seems like you people have equipment that can absorb quite a lot of impact, to be able to survive a direct attack from Ellis…but because of that, I can play to my heart’s content.”

There was some cruelty in that smile.

Kamijou didn’t know what the ‘direct hit from Ellis’ meant, but he could roughly guess that it was the attack that the stone golem had released. Just seeing the road block that had been blown to pieces, one could imagine how shocking the power was.

“Why…”

Kamijou wanted to ask ‘why must you do such a thing’, but was unable to say it.

In contrast, the blond lady didn’t seem to feel anything, just saying casually,

“Oh, so you’re that Imagine Breaker? Isn’t the key to the Imaginary Number District with you? That…how do you pronounce that? Ka…Kazakiri whatsoever. Really, Japanese names are too complicated.”

With an impatient look on her face, the lady played with her blond hair.

“Anything, whoever it is will do. Besides, it’s not like I have to kill that brat.”

“What?”

Kamijou couldn’t help but suspect that he had heard that wrong.

He could vaguely tell that this woman was after him and Kazakiri, so he was stunned when he saw the woman have such a casual attitude.

“Don’t you understand? Basically saying, it doesn’t matter even if the one I want

to kill is you.”

The woman raised her oil pastel and quickly drew a horizontal line.

The stone golem responded and stamped hard on the floor. The strong tremor caused Kamijou to lose his balance. The stone golem again stamped onto the floor, and Kamijou finally fell to the floor. It was unknown how the woman was still standing upright. It was like she was isolated from the image, as she was the only one who couldn’t feel the impact.

“The ground’s my strength. In front of Ellis, nobody can stand upright. Fall, be hopeless as you lie on the ground! You defeated dogs, can you still bite me now?”

The blond woman let out a declaration of victory, and Kamijou, who was lying on the floor, could only glare at her.

Truly, in this situation, it was a curb stomp battle. The Anti-Skill members who were wielding guns were unable to effectively attack, and if their guns were pointed in the wrong direction, there was the possibility of them hitting their own men.

Kamijou tried to stand up, and the woman again drew another line with the oil pastel. The stone golem stamped again, causing the ground to tremble again. Kamijou had the Imagine Breaker ability, and he only needed just one finger to destroy the stone golem, but he couldn’t move at all.

“You…you woman…”

“Not ‘you woman’, my name’s Sherry Cromwell, remember this. However…it’s useless to say my name to you, since you’ll die here. It’s useless even if I’m to say that I’m from the Anglican Church.”

“WHAT?”

Kamijou frowned.

Anglican Church. Wasn’t that the organization that Index was affiliated to?

On seeing Kamijou, Sherry revealed a slight sneer.

“I need a spark to ignite a war, so I have to let more people know about it. I’m a member of the Anglican Church, got it?—ELLIS!”

Sherry flipped her wrist and used the oil pastel to draw a circle. The stone golem called Ellis started to move, standing firmly on the floor, and raised that terrifyingly huge fist. Though it was not a punch that was going to be made without preparation, it was still a punch that could crush a road block. Kamijou wanted to get away, but the tremor on the ground caused him to be unable to move, and he could only wave his right hand wildly.

“MOVE ASIDE, BOY!”

Suddenly, an angry shout could be heard from beside him.

An injured Anti-Skill member who was lying on the floor was holding tightly onto a rifle. Before Kamijou could move, the little muzzle started to emit sparks. Gunfire and flashes coved the entire underground street. The bullets that ripped the air continuously collided with Ellis’ legs in order to force the stone golem down.

However…

“WAH!”

A stream of strong wind pressure fizzed past Kamijou’s face, forcing him to make that sound.

Ellis, who was covering the entire passage, was made of steel and concrete. When one fires at this several ton wall, the bullets would naturally bounce off like a ping-pong ball.

Anti-Skill was aiming to protect Kamijou’s life from Ellis, and truthfully, Ellis’ feet had stopped. As Anti-Skill was focusing their fire on Ellis’ legs, Ellis couldn’t stamp onto the floor. If it did lift its legs carelessly, the bullets may have hit Sherry, who was behind.

However, as the bullets were still bouncing off Ellis, they ended up bouncing off in different directions. In the end, Kamijou could only remain on the floor and not move. Anti-Skill was concentrating on firing, and Kamijou was worried about whether he would be hit by stray bullets as he covered his head with both

hands.

(Damn it, if I can just touch it…!)

Kamijou and the golem were less than 3m apart, but carelessly moving forward to touch Ellis was a dangerous thing to do. It was obvious to say that the closer he was to Ellis, the more likely he would be hit by stray bullets.

The only chance would be when they reload.

The Anti-Skill rifles were unable to beat the stone golem, and the rifles couldn't possibly have unlimited ammo. After a while, the bullets would be used up. During the few seconds when they reloaded, the flying bullets would vanish. The only chance would be at that moment, when he would rush at Ellis.

Kamijou tightened his body, getting ready to move forward at any second.

Clack.

Suddenly, some gentle footsteps rang behind Kamijou.

As the gunfire continued to reach his ears, that gentle footstep, for some reason, Kamijou had a deep impression of it.

In order to avoid being hit by bullets, he continued to remain prone on the ground, only moving his neck to look behind.

The emergency red lights were very weak, and so he couldn't see the entire underground street clearly. The entire passage was pitch black except for the emergency lights that barely showed the way out. The footsteps came from the darkness.

Those footsteps weren't of one who was trained, nor did they have the presence of a new enemy. It was like someone was trembling as this person entered a haunted house, or a child who went back to school late at night to take back something that was left behind; it sounded rather timid.

A bad premonition rose up Kamijou's chest.

And this premonition came true.

“Erm…that…”

He could hear a girl’s voice.

Under the dim red lights, the owner of the voice gradually appeared. It was the girl that Kamijou was familiar with. A long skirt covering her thighs, straight-haired with a rubber band tied beside her ear, and a pair of thin-framed spectacles—it was Kazakiri Hyouka. She was standing right in the middle of the passage, slowly walking over.

“DAMN IT! WHY WEREN’T YOU WAITING FOR SHIRAI!”

The shout that wasn’t any softer than the gunfire echoes throughout the underground street.

Kamijou wanted to dash forward at the completely defenseless Kazakiri, who was standing over there, but he couldn’t move due to the flying bullets.

However, Kazakiri seemed like she didn’t understand the situation as she said,

“…Erm…because…”

“DON’T SAY ANYTHING, HURRY UP AND GET DOWN!”

“…Eh?”

On hearing Kamijou’s shout, Kazakiri was stunned.

PAM! After that, her head got blown backwards.

“Ah?”

Kamijou inadvertently let out this sound of disbelief.

Of course, a human’s eyes couldn’t see bullets that were flying about. However, anyone could guess what happened. Some of the rifles bullets that had hit Ellis bounced off and hit Kazakiri’s face. Some skin and muscle was blown off, and her spectacles were blown away.

However, Kamijou was unable to believe the truth that appeared in front of him. No, it was that he didn’t want to believe. His mind was blank due to the

confusion.

It was unknown when the gunfire ceased. The Anti-Skill members just stared at the girl that was hit. Seeing her target come forward like this and self-destruct in such an unexpected manner, Sherry frowned slightly as well.

At this moment,

Kazakiri’s body arched backwards.

Like a puppet that didn’t respond.

They could hear that her face got partly destroyed. A thing that resembled a shell dropped onto the floor with a bit of long hair. The bullets seemed to have hit the right side of her face, and the shape of her head was destroyed completely. The broken spectacles landed on the floor, and the ripped off ear still had the edge of the spectacle frame on it.

“Ka…KAZAKIRI—!!”

Kamijou frantically stood up and dashed towards Kazakiri. As he was too panicky, his feet were as slumber as a drunk.

But after getting to Kazakiri, Kamijou suddenly stopped.

His face was full of shock and surprise.

However, it was not because the scene was too devastating.

Kazakiri’s injuries were definitely grave, the right half of her head had been blown off. She didn’t seem like she had got hit by bullets, but rather, like there had been a bomb in her brain, the wound was so frighteningly big. Such overwhelming destruction was far more than what a person could imagine in everyday life. It made Kamijou feel such a lack of realism, such that even he was about to laugh.

But that wasn’t the biggest problem.

The biggest problem that Kamijou was facing now could make anyone forget about the above.

Kamijou carefully inspected Kazakiri's wound.

It was truly a huge wound that had caused half her head to blow off. However, the wound was hollow. There was no flesh, no bone, no brain, nothing at all. There was not even a drop of blood from Kazakiri Hyouka's wound.

It was just like a fake human that was made of papier-mâché, or a 3D puppet that was made from multiple angles. The realistic looking skin looked merely like layers of light purple plastic when one looked from the inside of the hole.

At the middle of the large hole in her head, there was a small magnet-like thing floating. There a triangular column showing the skin color, the base was an equilateral triangle with less than 2cm on each side, the height was less than 5cm. The little column remains fixed there, spinning continuously. The sides of the triangular column had many rectangular things on it, each 1mm long and 2mm wide. Like a super-mini piano keyboard, as if there were invisible fingers playing it, the rectangular keys on the sides of the triangular column continued to move back and forth.

(What…is this…)

Kamijou was completely confused. The scene in front of him was too far away from reality; nobody could associate the feeling of 'it looks painful' or 'it looks unbearable' with it.

Was this an esper power as well? Did Kazakiri's 'counter stop' create this kind of phenomenon as well?

For a basic esper power, Kazakiri's current appearance was too abnormal. Even if there were only 7 Level 5 espers in Academy City like the Railgun and Accelerator, their bodies were still made of flesh. However, this Kazakiri was far different from a human.

"Uuu…"

Just as Kamijou was wondering what to do, Kazakiri let out a little moan.

Maybe it was because she had regained consciousness that the triangular column in the middle of her head started to spin rapidly, and the keys on the side were played even faster, like a firing pin on a sewing machine.

(No…)

At this moment, Kamijou was dragged back to reality, his entire body was feeling chilly all of a sudden.

(This seems to be the opposite…)

It wasn't the triangular column responding to Kazakiri's actions, but rather, Kazakiri was responding to the triangular column's movement, creating her mannerism and expression.

Even Sherry forgot to attack as well as she could only stare blankly at this phenomenon.

The keys on the side of the triangular pillar continued to be hit, ringing like a torrential rain. The triangular pillar started to spin rapidly like a computer trackball rolling. It was unknown what kind of processes were changed to cause this girl with a wide hole in her head to gradually look up.

Left with only an eye, Kazakiri blankly stared at Kamijou. As if she had just woken up, there was not even a sign of pain or dizziness.

While on the floor, she slowly sat up.

"Eh…? Glasses…where's my glasses…?"

She reached her hand out and touched the part where the spectacles should have been at…and seemed to feel that something was not right. First, her fingers shrank back as if she had touched scalding water. Next, she gingerly scraped her face with her fingers.

"What's…going on?"

Her fingers slowly stroked the edge of the opening.

"N…no…"

Her eyes gazed at the glass window of the coffee shop beside her.

Most likely, she saw her face off the reflection in the glass window, as her face

that was blown apart lost all color of blood. The only eyeball left was trembling nonstop, showing her inner anxiety and insecurity.

“No…what…is this? NO…!”

Unable to control her own feelings any further, Kazakiri swung her hair away and shrieked. Kamijou felt like he had lost his breath. Kazakiri seemed to have lost her sense of balance, as she shakily stood up, seemingly trying to get away from her reflection in the mirror. Or maybe her thoughts were too messed up that she actually ran towards the stone golem—Ellis.

Sherry recovered on seeing this and drew a horizontal line with the stone golem.

The stone golem waved its concrete arm.

As if shooing a fly away, the stone golem swung its fist and hit Kazakiri’s arm and abdomen. Kazakiri, who was running forward, ended up flying away without landing on the ground, flying for about 3m. Her fragile body collided viciously with the pillar, and then bounced off like a ping pong ball, forming a ‘<’ with the pillar at center, and landed behind Ellis, beside Sherry’s feet.

Pa! A vicious landing sound could be heard.

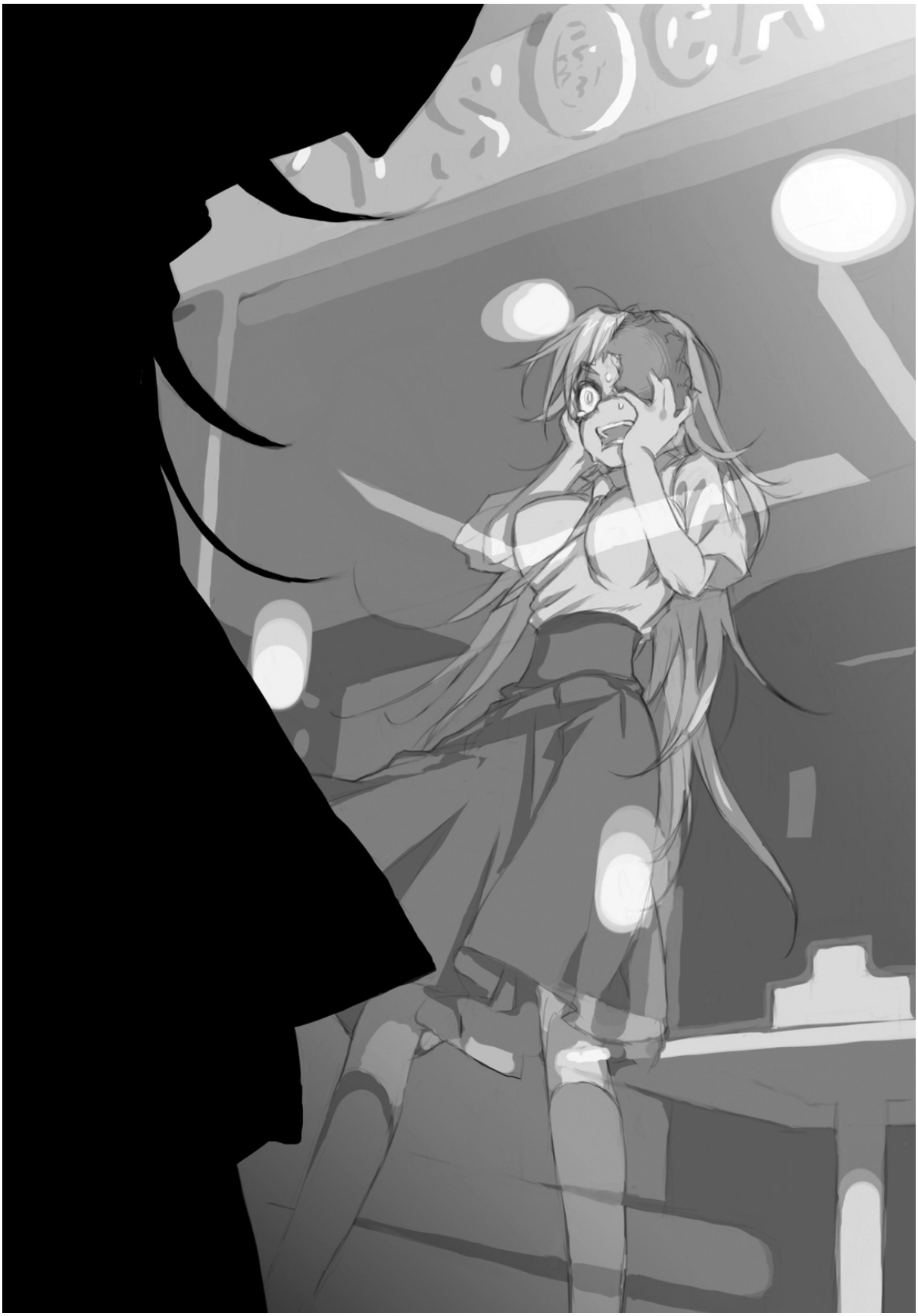
Looking closely, Kazakiri, who was hit by Ellis’ punch had her left arm ripped off, her flank was completely distorted like a box of candy being stomped on.

“Ah…”

Even so—

Even so, Kazakiri Hyouka’s body was still wriggling.

“Ah…ah…ahh, aHH,
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH—!!!!!!!”



This high-pitched scream that came from the nearby thoroughly battered body shocked Sherry. For the first time, she turned her attention to Kazakiri and raised her oil pastel. However, Kazakiri completely ignored Sherry, having lost all ability to see the current situation clearly. The moment she saw that her left arm that was ripped off was completely empty, she started to wave her limbs, as if slapping away a bug that landed on her, and escaped into the pitch black world of the passageway.

“Ellis!”

Sherry shouted lightly and tapped the surface of the oil pastel lightly with her fingertip. Ellis raised its fist and hit a nearby pillar. BOOM! The entire underground street continued to shake, and the ceiling clattered.

The next moment, the materials of the ceiling collapsed on the Anti-Skill group who were holding rifles.

“Humph, now this is interesting. Let’s go, Ellis. Let’s go capture that poor and funny little fox.”

Not looking at Kamijou and Anti-Skill who were buried alive one bit, Sherry raised the oil pastel in her hand and made one round with it, controlling Ellis and headed off into the darkness. It seemed like she was aiming to follow Kazakiri.

(Kazakiri…)

Kamijou just stood there in shock, unable to move for a while.

The scene just now was etched deeply into his mind.

Part 3

Shirai Kuroko was stunned.

After sending that irritating nun and her onee-sama back to the surface, she went

down to the underground street for a look…Kamijou Touma and the girl with little presence had already disappeared.

(How troublesome…should I start looking around here?)

Luckily, she could no longer hear the sounds of a battle. But as for when a battle would arise, nobody knew. And also, there were several civilians here.

In terms of threat level, Kamijou and Kazakiri were in most danger since they were targeted, but the people here may have been hit by debris, and she couldn't leave them alone like this.

In comparison to the people who were directly involved in this, it seemed more important to rescue these outsiders.

After pondering for a while, Shirai decided to save these people in front of her first.

(The value of life is the same for everyone. I know that onee-sama is worried and wants me to find them, but it doesn't seem right to leave these people here like this.)

Shirai sighed and walked towards the students who were locked underground and terrified.

The material that dropped from the ceiling was unexpectedly light, and the Anti-Skill members who were buried alive weren't too heavily damaged.

The Anti-Skill members lying around were injured, but at least no one was killed as they start to stitch or bandage their wounds.

Kamijou helped Anti-Skill move the materials off them, and ignored Anti-Skill's attempts to stop him as he ran off where Kazakiri and Sherry had gone. There were many department stores there, and each of them were linked to one another, and each basement level of the department stores were also linked to one another, creating a complex map that was like a spider web, completely different from the straight path from a while back.

(Damn it, what's going on…)

Kamijou was definitely mindful that Sherry called herself a member of the Anglican Church, but what bothered him even more was Kazakiri Hyouka.

Originally, she hadn't seemed to realize that her body was abnormal.

The moment she had seen herself in the mirror, she had screamed as if she had seen a monster.

To Kamijou, Kazakiri seemed to have just found out about the secret regarding her own body, and was now confused.

(…If so, this means that it's not Kazakiri's esper ability? Or rather that's her power that she's unaware of? Damn it, I'm all confused now. Is it alright now that she's like this now? But even if I want to heal her…damn it, what should I do?)

Thinking about this, Kamijou inadvertently stopped.

That mysterious appearance of Kazakiri appeared in his mind. Even if he wanted to save her, he didn't know how to. He couldn't even get an answer for such a basic question.

(Should I stop Sherry or find that escaped Kazakiri? Damn it, what should I do?)

After being troubled for quite a while, Kamijou pulled out his phone.

Anyway, there were too many things he didn't understand about Kazakiri Hyouka. If Kamijou wanted to ask someone with even more knowledge than him regarding esper power from the science side, there was only one best candidate.

Tsukuyomi Komoe.

Kamijou thought, she should be able to do something. However, the phone couldn't get any reception. Thinking about it, when he was at the playground, he couldn't hear the contents of the conversation properly.

(Anyway, I got to get near a base station first.)

Kamijou looked around, and then walked forward. After walking for a while, he

saw a sports shop. There seemed to be something like an antenna on the side wall.

Kamijou moved to a position below the antenna, and the phone could finally get reception.

After just two rings, Komoe-sensei picked up the phone.

“Ah! Kamijou? Good! Good! I finally contacted you! Kamijou, where are you right now?”

“You’re looking for me, sensei?”

“Himegami tried to call you, but it seemed like there was bad reception.”

Kamijou tilted his head as he recalled. So that call was made by Himegami.

“Kamijou, Kamijou. Sensei got something to say to you…”

“Sorry, sensei, I’m in a rush here as well. Can you hear me out first?”

“Eh…? Sensei’s going to say something important…alright, what do you want to say?”

Komoe-sensei didn’t insist and let aside instantly. Deep down, Kamijou earnestly said his thanks.

Kamijou basically explained Kazakiri’s situation to Komoe-sensei. Of course, he purposely left out her name and the gunfight, just asking, “Is there a power that will create these symptoms?”

But Komoe-sensei pondered for a while, and then said,

“…Kamijou, you’re talking about Kazakiri Hyouka, right?”

Spot on with just one sentence.

On hearing this, Kamijou was speechless. Komoe-sensei seemed to feel relaxed as she said,

“Mm, to be honest, what sensei wants to say is regarding her.”

“Eh? Sensei checked up on Kazakiri? Why?”

“Kamijou, sensei will tell you that the school has a so-called security system. Besides, since there’s an esper development program inside the school, and that there’s an increase in trend of strange crimes recently, it’s natural to investigate an outsider who’s not a transfer student and yet appeared here, right?”

Komoe-sensei also mentioned that since that nun had interacted with Komoe-sensei several times, the nun wasn’t investigated.

At this moment, Kamijou remembered those words that Himegami said at noon near the school gate.

—But the records indicate that I should be the only transfer student.

“Next, regarding Kamijou’s question…there is such an esper. Like for example, those with the Metamorphose ability can change their bodies according to their will.”

“So this means that Kazakiri is…”

“No, Metamorphose is an extremely rare ability, there are only three people with this ability in Academy City. And Kazakiri Hyouka is not one of these three.”

Komoe-sensei’s voice became slightly stiff.

“Also, there’re some things about Kazakiri Hyouka that can’t be explained with the Metamorphose ability.”

“What do you mean?”

Deep inside his heart, Kamijou had a bad feeling about this.

Whether it was correct or not, Kamijou couldn’t tell.

“Kamijou, sensei just said that the school has a security system. There are many things similar to surveillance cameras around the school.”

Komoe-sensei paused for a while, then continued,

“However, none of the cameras caught sight of Kazakiri Hyouka. We contacted

Anti-Skill and checked the satellite images, and yet we couldn't spot any suspicious people…at that time, that Kazakiri Hyouka that appeared beside you, when did she get inside the school?"

"What…?"

"Did you see her leave the cafeteria when she disappeared? Sensei didn't see it. It's like she vanished into thin air…"

"Wait…wait a second! Does that mean that Kazakiri is an esper who has both the Metamorphose and Teleport abilities at the same time?"

"Kamijou, having too many abilities will cause too much burden to the brain, it's confirmed that it can't happen. But sensei's next hypothesis may be even more unbelievable than having multiple abilities."

For some reason, Kamijou was afraid to continue listening.

But he couldn't avoid the problem. Kamijou swallowed his saliva and asked,

"Komoe-sensei, what's your guess?"

"Sensei's guess is…"

Komoe-sensei slowly said,

"It has a lot to do with the AIM diffusion field—"

On hearing that, Kamijou didn't have much of a deep impression on it.

"AIM…it's that energy that espers unconsciously let out, right?"

"That's right. If I want to add on, it's that the AIM diffusion field is extremely weak, such that a machine is required to detect it, and the energy released by each esper is different."

"Then what does that have to do with Kazakiri? Is it that the energy that Kazakiri unconsciously lets out will create such a shocking phenomenon?"

Komoe-sensei didn't answer Kamijou's question, and continued,

“Didn’t sensei say it this morning? In order to carry out research for her classmates from my college days, sensei was carrying out research regarding AIM.”

At this moment, there was the sound of paper being ruffled,

“Revealing the contents of other people’s theses is prohibited, but sensei believes that your mouth is sealed tight…the contents of this research thesis is regarding the additional effects of multiple AIM diffusion fields gathering at the same place.”

The more Kamijou listened, the more he was unable to understand what Komoe-sensei was trying to say. Did these things really have anything to do with Kazakiri Hyouka? Was she just grumbling or having a conversation? Just as Kamijou was thinking about this, Komoe-sensei said,

“Kamijou, if you use a machine to test a human, you can get many values, right?”

“Eh?”

“The generation of heat, heat lost, heat absorbed; The reflection of light, refraction, absorption; The creation of electric flow within humans and the creation of electric fields; the amount of oxygen used up, the amount of carbon dioxide released; and more basically, weight and mass…sensei believes that it’s impossible to list them all—even if the machines used are different, we can measure tens of thousands of values.”

“And so what?”

Kamijou noticed the surrounding darkness and prompted Komoe-sensei to continue on.

“This is just sensei’s guess…”

Komoe-sensei paused for a while, then continued,

“If we look at it from the other way, if we gather all these human values, wouldn’t we form a ‘human’?”

“What…?”

Kamijou was utterly shocked, unable to say anything.

“There are all sorts of esper in Academy City. Every esper will subconsciously let out a weak energy. Even though the energy everyone lets out is weak, if they are all gathered, it may create a complete significance. It’s like any English letter like ‘B’ or ‘P’; on their own, they have no meaning on their own, but if we are to arrange many of them together, we can create significant words like ‘select’ and ‘start’. Sensei feels that this is the basis for forming Kazakiri Hyouka. ‘Kazakiri Hyouka’ is like numerous English letters stringed together to form a command code that’s entered into a computer. Every student in the city provides a letter, and these letters will form a code, which in turn forms a process.”

Komoe-sensei said.

On first glance, it seemed like Kazakiri Hyouka vanished into thin air.

But what if that was not the case?

What if Kazakiri Hyouka had never existed right from the beginning?

If we reversed the thoughts.

What if it was not because there was someone around that there was a body temperature, but that because there was a body temperature that one assumed that there was someone around?

Pyrokinesis brings body temperature, telekinesis brings touch, sonicwave energy brings sound. All sorts of AIM diffusion fields form numerous numbers and letters, forming a code and creating a ‘process’, perfectly creating a human shape on this world.

“Wait…wait a second! That’s ridiculous! What values to form a human…didn’t you say it before, sensei? There are tens of thousands of them!”

“Yes, but Academy City has 2.3 millions espers, right? Like the pyrokinesis espers being in charge of body temperature unknowingly, the electrogenerators unknowingly being in charge of the electric flow within humans. All these add up to form the process called Kazakiri Hyouka.”

Komoe-sensei said this without any hesitation, rather confident of it. Kamijou gasped.

Starting from the fingertips, he was gradually losing heat.

He even forgot that he was right in the middle of a battlefield, where the enemy could be lurking anywhere.

Truly, if one could use telekinesis to create the energy required to flick a finger, perhaps it was possible to create the sense of touch of a skin's tension. By manipulating the vibrations in the air, 'sound' could be created. By manipulating the refraction of light, one could 'see' shape.

"Himegami said that she often heard of people saying that they witnessed an 'incomplete Kazakiri Hyouka'. At that time, maybe Kazakiri Hyouka was like a phantom that existed on a different plane. In terms of coding, it's like a command that can't be executed due to the lack of a few letters. Thus, it can't be captured with sight or smell. The senses can't capture it, but there is that feeling. The Kazakiri Hyouka research lab that was said to exist in Kirigaoka was originally set up to thoroughly investigate this phantom that doesn't really seem to exist, right? If not, it's an AIM diffusion field research facility."

A phantom that seemed like it didn't really exist.

Kamijou recalled the hole on Kazakiri's head and inadvertently shuddered. After that, he remembered something.

"But Kazakiri herself doesn't seem to notice this. She always thought of herself as a human, so when she noticed that her body was abnormal, she ran away in fright. If Kazakiri wasn't human right from the beginning, wouldn't this be abnormal?"

"What's unreasonable?"

"What…?"

"Sensei is asking, if she thought that she was human right from the beginning, why would she need to suspect whether she's a human?"

"This—"

—How is it possible? Kamijou was dumbstruck.

According to Komoe-sensei's guess, Kazakiri Hyouka may be something created by the AIM diffusion fields generated by the 2.3 million espers in Academy City…

In other words, it had absolutely nothing to do with her will.

Even her own thoughts were an illusion created from the outside world.

"In conclusion, Kazakiri Hyouka isn't human, but a physical phenomenon created by the AIM diffusion fields."

Komoe-sensei's words spun Kamijou all around.

"Damn it…how can there be such a thing…that's too much."

"Too much? Kamijou, your thinking here is wrong."

"…What? Sensei, are you trying to tell me that it's stupid to have feelings about a natural phenomenon?"

"On the contrary, Kamijou, if you're going to continue to say this, sensei will have to lecture you."

For some reason, Komoe-sensei seemed to be angry.

"Kamijou, sensei will tell you this. If this guess is accurate, Kazakiri Hyouka is not a human. Even if she has everything that a human needs, she can't be called a 'human'. No matter how much she tries, her nature is such that she's a non-existent illusion that will disappear on the slightest touch."

Komoe-sensei paused for a while, and then continued,

"But why a human?"

Komoe-sensei sounded rather emphatic.

"Sensei never talked to Kazakiri Hyouka, so she has no right to express her thoughts, but in your eyes, how do you view Kazakiri Hyouka? Do you also think that Kazakiri Hyouka is just an illusion that has no life, feelings, basically

just a thing appearing in front of you?”

“…”

No, that wasn't it. Kamijou recalled. Kazakiri looked rather happy when she was with Index. Kazakiri, who was often scared by Kamijou’s words, seemed like she had her own intentions, and could act according to her own thoughts.

“Do you think that Kazakiri Hyouka isn’t something that’s important, that it’s alright even if she’s to vanish? A human, not a human; a real, a fake; are you going to use these to form prejudices against her?”

No, of course not. Kamijou concluded. Kazakiri had looked rather painful. She was just a simple, lonely girl, who saw the truth that she had never known before, was unable to accept this cruel truth, was all confused and could only run into the darkness.

Kamijou gritted his teeth.

He couldn’t just do nothing.

Even if she was just an illusion that would disappear once his right hand touched her.

There was no reason on Earth to decide she should just vanish.

“Hoho, that’s the way. Sensei likes those honest sheep the most.”

Hearing Komoe-sensei’s laugh, Kamijou slightly heaved a sigh of relief, and then thought of another question.

The thing regarding the friend whom Komoe-sensei was helping in regards to the research on AIM diffusion fields.

“Sensei, I want to ask something. Does that friend of sensei want to research on the truth regarding Kazakiri?”

“Sensei’s not too sure about this. Sensei only knows that that friend is researching the interference caused by multiple AIM diffusion fields. As for whether the person found out about Kazakiri Hyouka, sensei doesn’t know.

However, at least sensei hasn’t heard of any research relating to Kazakiri Hyouka. The hypothesis just now was just made based on the information sensei’s friend provided.”

“…”

“Hm? What’s wrong? Why aren’t you saying anything? Don’t worry, sensei won’t tell this to her friend. Even if she says this, it won’t affect the completion of the thesis.”

“But, even though I can’t determine the value, this should be something important to a researcher, right? If sensei’s friend is to find out about Kazakiri, the friend won’t remain silent for long…”

“Hahaha, that’s true. If the hypothesis is true, Kazakiri Hyouka’s existence will be a huge discovery in the AIM field. The one who found it may end up leaving their name in the history books. But if so, Kazakiri Hyouka will be locked into the icy room. Kamijou, do you think that sensei wants this to happen?”

“This…”

“If you really think so, sensei will really be disappointed. Kamijou, who do you think this Komoe-sensei is? Even though I’m so simple that it borders on naivety, but as a teacher, this is the biggest pillar of support in my heart. Sensei’s job scope doesn’t involve selling out her students’ important friends to increase her reputation.”

Komoe-sensei used the words ‘important friend’.

How much significance that held, Kamijou finally understood.

“Hoho, don’t make Kazakiri Hyouka cry due to sadness.”

After saying that, Komoe-sensei hung up the phone.

Kamijou Touma lowered his head and stared at the cell phone for a while, then folded it and slipped it into his pocket.

He was clear on what he should do.

His mind understood where he should go.

“However…”

Kamijou couldn’t help but grit his teeth.

He couldn’t handle that stone golem by himself. The difference in strength was too great. Once that thing stamped and created a giant shockwave, Kamijou would be unable to stand up and have to prowl onto the ground.

(Hurry up! Calm down, quickly find an answer! Damn it, if I fail, Kazakiri will suffer!)

Kamijou understood that it was not that easy to find a way to settle things, but he forced himself not to stop. He was thinking about any possibilities now.

A surprise attack.

(No, the impact of that stamp will spread out in all directions with that stone golem at center. Even if I’m to get behind, I can’t avoid the attack!)

A weapon.

(That won’t do as well. Is there any weapon that can blow that several-ton stone golem? A knife or a metal rod can’t even do anything to it! Anti-Skill may have rockets or something like that, but an ordinary high school student can’t possibly use that!)

Kamijou Touma was starting to panic, scratching his head wildly. If he couldn’t think of any good ideas, it didn’t matter even if he was to scratch all his hair off. With every passing second, the sweat of anxiety continued to increase. That uncomfortable feeling made Kamijou want to let out a beast like roar.

Suddenly, from the mirror image on the glass window beside him, Kamijou saw someone standing behind him.

“!?”—

Kamijou turned his head around at a wind breaking speed.

Standing in front of him was…

“Ha…”

Kamijou inadvertently laughed. No, he was just letting out all the air that was accumulated in his lungs, naturally laughing it out. Ignoring his will, his face moved.

For a while, his face was just holding an expression of disbelief. After a while, he was finally able to show a smile.

“I see—”

The boy smiled.

“—I’m so stupid. Isn’t this something that anyone can think of, Kamijou Touma?”

With a smile full of self-confidence, the boy made up his mind.

The final trump card to fight against that stone golem was right in front of him.

Part 4

Up till now, Kazakiri Hyouka had felt a burning sensation of pain.

“Ugh…gueeh!”

Half of her face, the left wrist, the left abdomen felt like it was dipped inside molten metal as the sensation of pain occurred. Forget about running, Kazakiri couldn’t even stand up, and could only lay prone on the cold floor. In order to distract herself, she started to move her legs wildly, rolling on the floor.

She took signals of pain that any ordinary human would die from, but she couldn’t even escape by dying; it was like a living Hell.

But the pain didn’t last long.

“Ah…?”

A terrifying change occurred.

With squishy sounds like jelly being crushed, the wounds started to heal. Like a fast rewind the holes started to heal at a rate no human could possibly achieve.

The pain that would make anyone go crazy subsided like a decrease in temperature.

Those had definitely been fatal wounds.

She shouldn’t be alive at all.

Not just the skin, even the spectacles that had been blown apart and the edges of her clothes were starting to regain shape.

“Ah…ahhh…!”

With the sense of pain gradually disappearing, her originally blank mind started to process thoughts.

Regarding the fact that her body was hollow inside.

Regarding the fact that her body was abnormal.

Like an originally sealed memory being released, covering all her knowledge.

“Ahh…uu! Ky…uu…UUGH…UUGG!! AGH…UGH..MM…GYAA..GYAA…UU…UU…EE…GYYAAAHH!! UUU….UUUUU…KY…AAAHHH!!”

Her thoughts were all messed up such that she couldn’t compose a sentence, but the huge pressure inside Kazakiri Hyouka made her unable to hold back her cries.

At this moment, seemingly in response to the cry of despair within Kazakiri’s heart, another despair appeared.

A tremor shook the entire underground street.

Kazakiri fell off as if she was sitting on a berserk horse's back, as her body floated up in the air while her eyes were fixated on the other side of the darkness.

Standing there was an ugly monster made of iron and concrete.

Behind the monster was a blond lady who was even scarier.

The woman was smiling.

As if reminding Kazakiri that only humans could have such a distorted smile.

"Ugh…AAHHH…!!"

Kazakiri remembered the pain when she had gotten hit by the giant stone golem's huge arm, and instinctively tried to escape. But due to fear, her feet wouldn't oblige.

The woman didn't say anything to Kazakiri.

She silently raised the oil pastel that looked like white chalk and used it to draw. The stone golem swung a fist at Kazakiri's back.

Kazakiri frantically sprawled onto the floor.

However, her long hair that was swaying in the air still got hit by the stone golem, and Kazakiri felt a sharp pain, as if her scalp had been ripped off. Her body shot out like a cannonball.

"Kuu…!"

POW! Kazakiri's body let out a terrifying sound. Rolling on the floor with such a terrifying force, Kazakiri's entire body felt like it had been grinded by a large grindstone.

"Ah…ahh…ahhh…!"

The fragments of skin and hair that were forcefully ripped off formed a straight line that was several meters long.

Chichi…a strange sound could be heard from Kazakiri's face.

Touching her own face, Kazakiri was face was trembling strangely. The fragments of skin that had peeled off on the floor again returned back to their original position.

“How can there be such a laughable thing?”

The blond lady finally spoke, looking as if she had just seen something really awkward, and said,

“I thought the key to the Imaginary Number District was something that had 3 heads and 6 arms, to think that it’s actually such a thing! HAHA…HAHAHA! To create such a thing as a gem of science, it really makes people wonder!”

While the woman laughed, Kazakiri’s body started to recover. Her face started to let out sounds of water being compressed, and reverted back to its original shape within a few seconds.

“Ugh…ahh!”

Kazakiri started to feel fearful and irritation at her own body. In contrast, Sherry said happily,

“Hoho…but if so, killing you will be a lot more troublesome. Hm, how about we try this? Let’s turn you into a pile of minced meat, and see if you can recover?”

“Wh…wh…yy…?”

“Hm?”

“Why…must you…do such an unreasonable thing?”

“Oh, no particular reason.”

Such a cruel sentence made Kazakiri Hyouka speechless.

“There’s no real reason for it to be you. It’s alright even if it’s not you. However, the fastest method is for me to take you out. That's the reason. How? Simple?”

Before Kazakiri’s mind could process the shock, the woman had already waved the oil pastel, and the stone golem Ellis swung its fist at Kazakiri, who was on

the floor. Kazakiri frantically rolled backwards, and Ellis' fist crushed the ground; the shrapnel pierced into Kazakiri's entire body. Kazakiri's body bounced up due to the impact. With the huge horrific sound, a certain part of her body got distorted. The abnormal pain caused Kazakiri's mind to go blank, but as she rolled on the floor, Kazakiri's body started to recover. Though her body rolled all the way to the cross junction, she continued to breathe.

And neither was she dead.

But the woman intending to kill her didn't change her expression, not even a tinge of disappointment was on her face.

It was as if Kazakiri's life or death was insignificant to her.

Seeing her life being belittled like this, Kazakiri's eyes watered due to the humiliation. Also, she was angry at her own weakness; she was definitely unhappy, but she couldn't do anything about it.

Seeing Kazakiri's expression, the blond lady delightedly said,

"Oi oi, what's with that expression of yours? Don't tell me you're still afraid of death?"

"Eh?"

"Oi oi oi oi! What's with that justified look of yours? Haven't you realised? You were beaten up so badly and you aren't dead, how can you possibly be human?"

"…"

"What's with that pale look of yours? Are you trying to gain sympathy? Don't be foolish, even if you're to disappear, what will this world lose? Here's an example, watch!"

The blond lady used her thumb to tap the side of the oil pastel.

The next moment, the stone golem swung its fist horizontally. Its arm smashed into the wall and broke.

"What I did to you was like this."

“Ah…”

“Even if a monster has its limbs broken, who will sympathise with you? Don’t you understand? Why must we show feelings to those that don’t have life? Must I make this thing to be such that it can shed tears? Wouldn’t I become like a pervert who delights in taking off a doll’s clothes?”

“AH…UWAAHH!”

In front of the despairing Kazakiri, the damaged arm of the stone golem started to regrow as it absorbed the surrounding glass and materials, reverting back to its original state. That look actually looked similar to her right now.

That was Kazakiri Hyouka’s true nature.

The real, ugly nature of her's once the human skin was peeled off.

“Do you understand now? Right now, you’re a monster like Ellis. You can’t escape. Where do you want to run to? Is there a place that accepts such a monster like you? Do you understand now? Hurry up, why do you still not understand? There’s no place to accommodate you.”

The woman slowly waved the oil pastel in her hand, and the stone golem slowly moved towards Kazakiri.

Kazakiri continued to remain dumbstruck in a fallen position.

She couldn’t move.

Not because of her injuries, since they had already healed a long time ago.

Not because of her psychological fear, since it was telling her to run away.

However,

Where could she run to?

Kazakiri remembered.

—Today’s the first day she went to school.

Thus she thought that she was a transfer student.

—Today’s the first day she had a nutritious meal

Thus she said that she wanted to check out the school cafeteria.

—Today’s the first day she spoke to a boy.

Thus she thought that she was afraid of the boy because of that.

—Today’s the first day she used the vending machine.

She had knowledge on how to use a vending machine, but she never drank from it before. In the past, how did she manage to find an excuse to explain this anomaly?

The first time, the first time, the first time, the first time, the first time. These were all first times, no exceptions.

Then what was she doing in the past? Why didn’t her heart raise such a suspicion? It was as if she thought that she didn’t exist in the past. Right now, Kazakiri discovered that the ‘me’ right now was just a bubble of illusion floating among the mist.

Even if she was to look away, it was meaningless.

Even if she didn’t look at her wounds, the pain wouldn’t subside.

No matter how hard she tried, it was too late. Kazakiri couldn’t escape, couldn’t hide. There was no wonderland on the world that could warmly receive this ugly monster that didn’t have any self-awareness.

Inside the pocket of her skirt was the photograph that Kazakiri had taken together with that white girl.

But the girl in the photo, Index, didn’t know.

She didn’t know that Kazakiri Hyouka’s real identity was such a monster.

Once she knew the real identity beneath the human skin,

At that moment, the girl would not smile back at her. Not only that, she would prefer to think that she didn't smile at her. This was because the Kazakiri Hyouka that was smiling in the photo didn't exist anymore. What remained was an ugly monster with a fake human exterior.

Tears gathered in Kazakiri's eyes.

She really wanted a warm world, wanted to smile with a certain someone, even if for a minute, a second; if she could just get this short moment of light, it was alright no matter how much she lowered her head to beg.

But in the end…

Nobody would grant this request.

"Don't cry, you monster."

The blond lady mockingly waved the oil pastel.

"Seeing you cry makes me sick."

That gigantic arm of the stone golem that could even break through thick wood closed in.

"Ahh…"

Kazakiri pondered while in despair.

Though she didn't want to die.

Instead of saying that nobody wanted her, it was more like once anyone saw her, they would completely treat her as a monster. Thus, it may be better to die here.

Kazakiri closed her eyes tightly.

Curling her body tight, waiting for the imminent Hell of pain.

The pain didn't come.

After a while, there was still no sound.

But this strange silence wrapped around Kazakiri Hyouka’s body, warmly and gently. It was like she returned to a warm house with a roof while it was pouring outside.

Kazakiri Hyouka gingerly opened her eyes.

There seemed to be a familiar figure in front of her. However, her tears blocked her vision, and she could only see a blurry image.

The figure seemed to be that of a boy.

Kazakiri was standing in the middle of the cross junction. Standing in front of Kazakiri and facing the stone golem, the boy seemed to have cut in from the underground street beside her. The side of the face seem to enter her vision in a blurry manner.

The stone golem stopped moving.

The boy casually reached out his right hand and grabbed the stone golem’s giant arm. The palm was like a powerful fist that could even crush a battle tank.

Such a simple action caused the stone golem to be unable to move—even letting out a cracking sound.

“Ellis?”

The voice of a woman could be heard from afar.

“Ellis, why aren’t you responding? ELLIS? DAMN IT, WHAT’S GOING ON!?”

For the first time, the woman sounded panicky. However, the boy didn’t even look at her.

The boy just stared directly at Kazakiri Hyouka’s face.

“Seems like I was late.”

The boy’s voice caused Kazakiri’s shoulders to tremble slightly. Even though she couldn’t see clearly due to the tears, the voice was ever so familiar.

Truthfully, Kazakiri had only met a few people.

Such a powerful voice.

Such a warm voice.

Such a reliable voice.

And most importantly,

Such a gentle voice.

The boy said to Kazakiri,

“However, it’s alright. Don’t cry, it’s so ugly. What’s the point of crying over such a trivial matter?”

Like a child, Kazakiri Hyouka reached her hand out to wipe her eyes.

The cover of tears was removed.

The boy was in front of her.

Kamijou Touma was in front of her.

Revealing an expression that was like an intimate friend.

The stone golem behind him started to crack before it crumbled.

The wall of despair that no one could cross seemed to be broken.

“ELLIS…STOP STANDING OVER THERE BLANKLY, ELLIS!”

A roar that was full of anger and fear.

The blond lady gripped tightly onto the white oil pastel, almost breaking it. She raised it and started to doodle on the wall as if she was drawing out a sword, muttering hastily at the same time.

The concrete wall collapsed like dried dirt. And within a few seconds, it was as if an invisible hand molded a stone golem with a head on top.

The woman looked rather anxious, but she hadn’t lost her cool yet.

This was an ace that could regenerate no matter how many times it was destroyed. Also, this was the biggest advantage to the blond lady. The stone golem could be used as a shield, as a bait, as a strikeforce or to self-destruct.

Kamijou turned his head around.

In order to protect this girl that was being bullied, he stood in front of the ugly stone golem.

Seeing the situation, Kazakiri was terrified, whereas the blond lady was laughing.

“Ho…haha! WAHAHAHA! IS THIS A JOKE? OI, WHAT CAUSED YOU TO GROW UP TO BECOME LIKE THIS? HAHAHA! BE HAPPY, MONSTER! THIS WORLD ISN’T SO BAD TO YOU! AT LEAST THERE’S STILL AN IDIOT HERE!!”

The deepness of the voice caused Kazakiri’s shoulders to tremble violently.

That was right. The boy came here to protect her. Though that was something worth taking comfort from, she couldn’t just let the boy get involved in this battle between monsters. Kazakiri Hyouka didn’t want to see the boy that worked so hard to create this warm world for her to fall over here.

However, no matter how terrified Kazakiri was, the boy was unmoved even as he was facing the stone golem.

The boy said,

“It’s not just me.”

“What?”

The woman was shocked.

At that moment,

BOOM! A bright light appeared.

The white rays of light almost blinded her eyes as Kazakiri inadvertently used

her hands to cover them.

Kazakiri was sitting in the middle of the cross junction, and the light came from the 3 lanes other than the one the blond lady was standing in. The dazzling lights even caused Kazakiri to have a migraine, but she barely managed to squint her eyes and look around.

It was as intense as a car's headlamp.

The light actually came from the searchlights attached onto rifles. And it was not just one or two; right now, there were about 30, 40 people gathered here.

Anti-Skill.

None of them were unscathed. Some of them had bandages on their abdomens and heads, some were dragging their injured arms and legs, and all of them looked like patients that should be lying on the hospital beds.

But they were not afraid at all.

Not caring for their own safety, not uttering anything even with so much pain, they came back to this battlefield where they were extremely likely to die. These people weren't mighty men like those main characters in an action movie, as there were women among them. The female Anti-Skill member wielding the transparent shield didn't seem to be fazed by her own injuries as she revealed a confident smile. Her eyes seemed to be saying, "Don't worry, it's alright."

"…Why…?"

Kazakiri Hyouka asked in surprise.

Though she couldn't be certain about how much these people knew about her, at least they should know that she wasn't an ordinary human. These people should have witnessed her face being hit by the stray bullets and immediately standing up after she got hit by the stone golem.

Thus, Kazakiri asked this.

Why?

Why didn’t they just shoot that terrorist together with her? Why did they purposely come all the way over here just to protect her? Kazakiri Hyouka was unable to understand at all.

But the boy responded without any hesitation, “Don’t be silly. Is there a need for a reason?”

Facing this monster called Kazakiri, the boy didn’t look away from her even once.

The expression was exactly the same as when they were in the arcade.

Among all these lights, he said,

Like usual, without any pretense, “This isn’t anything strange. I just spoke to them.”

In this place that was full of light, he said, “I told them…please save my friend.”

For a moment, Kazakiri Hyouka was unable to understand what this sentence meant.

For Kazakiri Hyouka wasn’t a human, but a monster; her body was hollow, there was nothing underneath her skin. She had been hit by gunfire, blown away by the stone golem, and yet she wasn’t dead. Any doctor or scholar would drop their jaws if they saw this.

Didn’t these people care at all?

Were they willing to accept the ‘unknown’ body that Kazakiri herself despaired over?

Maybe it was because it was Academy City. 80% of the population here were students, and each had their own powers. Everyone knew that each person is different, so they were more accepting Kazakiri Hyouka who was ‘different from others’.

Can I continue to remain here?

Are they willing to smile and accept me?

The boy said to the perplexed Kazakiri,

“Wipe your tears clean and watch clearly. You should be proud of yourself since not one person here wants you dead.”

Kazakiri lifted her head up.

The world that was surrounded in darkness was already gone.

“Watch. We’ll prove to you that this world you live in isn’t so bad!”

Kazakiri understood.

Even though that blond lady caused the underground to be surrounded in darkness,

These people here would use light to fight the darkness,

In order to save the hand within the darkness that was waiting to be saved.

The boy then said,

“We’ll also let you know that your resting place won’t be destroyed so easily!”

Part 5

“ELLIS!”

Hiding behind the stone golem, Sherry shouted in an angry, almost trembling voice,

“—KILL THEM ALL! USE THESE PEOPLE’S CORPSES AS YOUR BODY’S MATERIALS!”

She shouted this as she waved her oil pastel. Numerous overlapping lines form the direction that the golem moved in.

“NOT SO FAST! FORMATION B! PROTECT THE CIVILIANS FIRST!”

With an Anti-Skill member shouting, everyone started to fire.

The Anti-Skill members formed up in pairs; the front person held a transparent shield and the ones behind started to fire. The shields weren’t mean to block Ellis, but to block the stray bullets.

Gunfire that almost broke their eardrums echoed throughout, and Kamijou and Kazakiri were pulled aside by a female Anti-Skill member. She used the transparent shield in her hand to protect them.

Pa Pa Pa Pa Pa Pa! The shield in front of them let out such a cry.

Seeing this, Kamijou was flabbergasted. Even the deflected bullets that hit Ellis had such power. Maybe because Kazakiri had been hit by a stray bullet before, she was trembling hard like a child afraid of thunder.

Kamijou saw the stone golem in front of him.

Ellis’s leg got concentrated fire that was like cannon fire which looked like the sun magnified with a mirror. It tried to take a step forward, as though it was trying to move through a strong wind. However, it was not able to take that step. As Ellis’s body was as big as a wall, the impact area was wide like an open sail waving in a storm. The concrete and glass that’s mixed inside Ellis’ body continued to be hit, but Ellis just absorbed the surrounding floor and wall, and even the bullets hitting it, quickly allowing it to recover.

“Cheh!”

On the other side of the screen of gunfire, Sherry let out an angry growl.

“‘The one similar to God’, ‘Medicine of God’, ‘Power of God’, ‘Fire of God’! The four elements that represent the four worlds will allocate the right power on the right direction, and bring forth the correct lead!”

The oil pastel quickly drew a distorted Cross in the air.

Chi chi…Ellis’ body started to cackle.

This was Ellis' cry.

The stone golem didn't have a mouth for it to speak, but the sound of pain echoed throughout the body. It continued to try and obey this impossible order, as if cracked gears were forced to spin and more gears were forced in. The stone golem's huge body let out cackling and terrifying sounds.

Even so, Ellis continued to move.

With that terrifying cackling sound, it finally took a step forward.

BOOM! A heavy sound slightly trembled the ground.

On seeing this, Sherry was delighted, continuing to wave the oil pastel.

"Ah…ah…what to do…"

In the explosion of gunpowder, Kazakiri couldn't help but ask.

"Though the situation isn't too good, it's still within what I expected. It'll be best if I can push her back or maintain her balance, it seems like things aren't going to go as I wanted."

Kamijou's words made Kazakiri doubt her own ears.

Then, the female Anti-Skill member wielding the transparent shield in her hand said,

"Are you sure you're going to do this, boy? No one will blame you if you back away, you know."

"I have to go up, you know. You just saw it, that huge piece of trash got destroyed when my right hand touched it. My right hand has such a power."

"It's true that Tsukuyomi-sensei told me this before…"

Kazakiri felt that strength was disappearing from her fingertips.

What were they saying? Kazakiri wondered. They seemed to be ready to carry out some shocking plan, and yet she herself didn't know anything.

“If I don’t do anything now, that thing will come over anytime. Besides, bullets can’t be fired forever, and you can’t possibly continue to hold that shield for much longer.”

“There’s only one chance. If you fail, we won’t be able to save you, we’ll shoot. At that moment, you’ll become bullet target like that stone golem.”

On hearing the Anti-Skill woman’s words, Kazakiri was shocked.

“…Wait…hold on…may I know…what you’re trying to do…?”

“Do you need to ask?”

Kamijou replied without hesitation,

“…We’re here to stop that monster.”

THUNK! The heavy footsteps of the stone golem could be heard again.

The sound was a lot more forceful than before. Sherry and Ellis were now starting to get used to the force of the barrage.

“No…this…is too dangerous…”

“Too bad my power can only be activated when my right hand touches it. If I could just release a long ranged attack like a railgun, it’d be a lot easier.”

BOOM! The earth shook again.

Like the traveler moving against the North wind, the stone golem continued to move forward.

Both sides were within 10m of each other.

“I’m about to give the order, and I’m going to confirm it with you again. Boy, are you ready?”

“…Yes.”

It was likely that they had already discussed what they should do before coming here.

Thus, the boy just needed to respond with a single sentence, and didn’t need to say anything more.

“Still trying to act cool, eh, boy? Sigh, Tsukuyomi-sensei really taught her students well.”

The female Anti-Skill member smiled slightly, and then pulled out a mini-wireless telephone.

“Alright, then I’ll play with you then. However, you must succeed, and come back alive. We’ll try and coordinate with you.”

On hearing this, Kamijou’s lips curled up.

At that moment, Kazakiri discovered that the boy was trying his best to hold himself from trembling.

“On the count—THREE!”

The female Anti-Skill member gave some command to the wireless radio.

Kazakiri felt goosebumps down her body. Was this boy really thinking of rushing outside of the shield arrays and at the stone golem? In this rain of bullets, even the people firing the guns wouldn’t be able to tell where the bullets would fly to.

Once he was hit, he was dead.

It was not possible for him not to be afraid.

“—TWO!”

Originally crouched on the floor, Kamijou slightly lifted his upper body.

“Wait…no! This…you’ll definitely die…this…no…I…!”

“Don’t stop me, Kazakiri.”

Facing Kazakiri, who was all in a disarray and distraught, Kamijou, who was supposed to be in the most danger said calmly,

“The reason you’re afraid of me should be because of this right hand, right? No matter good or evil, as long as it’s a supernatural power, it will be removed by this right hand, even you.”

Kamijou then said,

“So don’t try and reach your hand out to stop me.”

Kazakiri felt deeply shocked by it, almost unable to breathe.

Sherry also seemed to sense that Anti-Skill was trying to do something, waving her oil pastel even more frantically. Ellis despite getting hit hard by the concentrated fire, started stepping forward with more force.

But at that moment, Kamijou didn’t even look at Sherry.

He just focused on the girl in front of him.

Understanding the power in Kamijou’s right hand and why she would deliberately avoid this boy, Kazakiri couldn’t hide the shock on her face. Looking straight at Kazakiri, Kamijou said,

“However, don’t be too mindful. Even if you can’t touch me, you’re still my friend. And also, don’t think about dying so easily. I’ll come back alive, I will.”

“Ah…come back…alive…?”

“Yeah. We’ll then bring Index along, and go out to play again.”

After saying that, he smiled.

After that, he turned to look in front.

The voices of Anti-Skill seemed to cut off the last contact between Kamijou and Kazakiri.

“—ZERO!”

In an instant.

Anti-Skill stopped shooting.

Even Sherry didn’t expect this.

Since the bullets were the last line of defense that was protecting Anti-Skill, once they stopped firing, everyone would become victims of Ellis’ fist the next instant. Normally speaking, nobody would do such a suicidal thing.

But this was effective.

For Ellis’ heavy body suddenly tripped forward.

It was forcing its way forward as if it was resisting the North wind, only for the wind to suddenly stop. The excessive force generated on its body caused Ellis to lose balance and fall forward.

Kamijou jumped over the transparent shield and charged forward.

There was about 7m between him and Ellis.

“DAMN IT!! GET RID OF HIM, ELLIS!!”

Seeing Kamijou dash forward like a rocket, Sherry frantically waved her oil pastel.

Obediently following the order, Ellis raised its fist. However, its body was in an unstable state. If it tried to punch in this state, it would definitely trip. If so, Kamijou didn’t need to do anything, and without her shield to protect her, Sherry would immediately be shot by the Anti-Skill bullets. Kamijou just needed to get down and avoid the bullet fire.

Even so, Ellis still raised its fist.

Even so, Ellis still raised its fist.

As expected, the body that was already about to fall lost balance even more, and Ellis fell forward, face down. The stone golem was about 4m tall, and since the distance between the stone golem to Kamijou was about 7m, Kamijou would definitely not be crushed.

Kamijou gripped his fist hard, intending to catch the moment Ellis landed on the floor.

VOOM! Ellis swung its fist.

But even as it fell down, Ellis wasn't aiming its fist at Kamijou, but the floor.

"What…?"

With Ellis' fist as center, there was a spiderweb-like crack of radius 8m on the floor. The entire place acted like a cushion as it moved about, and Kamijou's body was tossed high up into the air. The walls, ceiling, pillars and every single corner let out a terrifying clattering sound, echoing throughout the underground street.

Then, Kamijou, who fell onto the ground, saw the giant stone golem Ellis use the impact caused by punching onto the floor to stand upright like a spring.

Sherry waved her right hand.

Ellis' giant fist was raised high again, as if it was trying to crush a bug on the floor.

"Damn it…"

Kamijou heard the slight sound of metal colliding with each other, and it seemed Anti-Skill was raising their weapons. However, they weren't firing yet. Once the torrent of bullets arrived, Kamijou would definitely be dead.

(Damn it, how can there be such a dumb thing! Hurry, think of how I'm going to get out of this…!)

Raising its fist, Ellis was just nicely positioned above Kamijou. In this situation, even if Kamijou used his right hand and destroyed Ellis' fist, several tons of rubble would collapse and crush him to death.

Even if he was to try and escape, due to the time left, he could only take one more step. Ellis was already over 4m tall, and the arm's length was about 2m. No matter whether he was to try and jump aside, left or right, or even roll backwards, he wouldn't be able to avoid the attack.

(Damn it, damn it! Isn't there any way…!)

Ellis' fist carried all the force of its weight as it headed down from directly above Kamijou. Kamijou at least understood that using his right hand to block it would be suicidal. He focused all his attention on his legs, strongly determined to jump over at it.

Not left, right nor backwards, but forward.

Ellis was over 4m tall. In other words, the blind spots close to its chest was a lot bigger than a human. There was already an almost 2m tall hole between its legs. Normally, if anyone was to try and sneak in between Ellis' feet, Ellis would definitely kick the person out.

However, Ellis was swinging its fist down.

While its entire body was unstable as the whole weight was focused on the fist, Ellis had to stand firm and maintain balance.

In fact, Kamijou, who was used to fighting, understands clearly that even though a forceful hit was powerful and looked cool, it had the flaw of being easily counterattacked. Due to the center of gravity, once it let out this hit, it wouldn't be able to evade.

Ellis couldn't move its legs by an inch before it finished swinging its fist.

Trying to maintain balance like a human caused Ellis' downfall.

Kamijou bent down, staying in a position close to the ground before jumping forward. Like an arrow released from the bow, he shot out between Ellis' legs.

Then,

Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta! Ellis' body emitted a lot of sparks. The Anti-Skill members who had raised their guns again squeezed the trigger.

Ellis' movements were again restrained.

And what was ironic was that Kamijou, who was standing behind Ellis, wouldn't be hit by the gunfire.

Kamijou slowly stood up, reaching his right hand out as he wanted to touch

Ellis’ back. But thinking about it, he didn’t do so. He looked away from Ellis and turned his head behind.

Sherry Cromwell was just in front of him.

“Ah…ELLIS…”

Full of fear and tension, Sherry shouted, but she was clear that if she was to move Ellis carelessly, Anti-Skill's rifle bullets would hit her. Also, Sherry was unable to escape from the narrow space behind Ellis.

The oil pastel in her hand was waving unnaturally. Unlike the clear actions she did before, she didn’t know what she should command Ellis to do.

Right now, Sherry had no one to turn to.

Her strongest weapon was right in front of her, yet it couldn’t move, even helping Kamijou block the enemy’s bullets.

“Good.”

Kamijou said.

He raised his right hand up and swung one huge round, as if he was trying to check the flexibility of his shoulder.

“Ah…”

Facing this situation of despair, Sherry inadvertently revealed a distorted smile.

“Haha, what the Hell. This means I have no way to escape now, is it?”

“There’s no need to.”

With gunfire ringing throughout, Kamijou closed an eye.

“You just need to sleep quietly.”

With a punch, Kamijou Touma sent Sherry Cromwell flying far without mercy.

Sherry’s tender flesh was like paper floating in the air as it continued to roll on

the floor.

Part 6

The gunfire hadn’t ceased.

Since Sherry was beaten down, Ellis couldn’t move; but Anti-Skill hadn’t given Ellis the decisive blow, so of course they didn’t dare to stop their attacks. Kamijou turned his eyes from Sherry, who was knocked 5m away, and turned to look at Ellis.

(Speaking of which, if I’m to suddenly destroy this…won’t the bullets hit me?)

Kamijou gingerly reached his right hand out to Ellis…

“Ho…hohoho…”

Suddenly, he could hear a girl’s laughter. Kamijou turned behind and looked at Sherry.

She was smiling, she was lying on the floor and smiling.

But she was still holding onto the white oil pastel.

Shua! She swung the oil pastel quickly on the floor as if she was drawing a sword, drawing some mysterious lines that looked like a picture or symbol.

“Ah…damnit, you’re thinking of creating of creating a second one?”

Kamijou dashed forward, intending to stop her.

“Hoho…hohoho…hohohohoho. That’s impossible. Since Ellis exists, I can’t create a second Ellis. If I could create more than one Ellis, why do you think I didn’t create an army of Ellises? Even if I’m to barely create a second one, I can’t maintain its shape, it’ll collapse like rotten mud.”

Sherry then laughed in a sinister way.

“But as long as I can use it properly, I can create such an effect.”

In an instant, with the lines that Sherry drew on the floor as center, an area of radius 2m collapsed. Sherry got carried into the hole and disappeared as if she had been swallowed by the hole.

“Damn it!”

Kamijou frantically dashed forward, but there was only a hole there. The hole was extremely deep, it was hard to tell how many meters deep it was. However, it seemed like there was air flow inside it.

(Damn it, this is an underground passage…)

Kamijou said. At that moment, Ellis, which wasn’t moving, suddenly collapsed. Since both golems couldn’t exist at the same time, it was likely that Sherry destroyed the old golem to create a new golem. With the destruction of the old Ellis, the gunfire ceased.

(However, it somehow doesn’t feel right.)

Seeing the inside of the dark hole, doubts lurked within Kamijou’s heart.

Sherry Cromwell's persistence to her target was too little. This was a lot different from the other magicians he had met up till now. If it had been those magicians from before, they would not escape that easily with the target Kazakiri Hyouka there (and Kamijou himself was a target as well).

(Think! What am I so worried!?)

Kamijou carefully recalled every word that Sherry had said before, his face looking serious as he lowered his head. After a while, he suddenly looked up.

“Oh, isn’t the key to the Imaginary Number District with you? That…that…how do you pronounce that? Really, Japanese names are so complex.”

That was right. Thinking back, Sherry’s interest in Kazakiri wasn’t that high from the start.

“I need a spark to ignite a war, so I have to let more people know about it. I’m a member of the Anglican Church, got it?—ELLIS!”

If Sherry had another motive, and killing Kazakiri was just one way to achieve the it…

“Anyhow, it’s alright whoever it is. It’s not like I have to kill that brat.”

If Kazakiri could be replaced by someone else…

“Hoho…hohoho…hohohohoho. Index, Imagine Breaker, the key to the Imaginary Number District, who shall I choose? Can I choose anyone? Hoho, what a hassle. It’s problematic if there are too many options.”

Sherry Cromwell didn’t escape.

She went off to find a new target.

Also…

She had only 3 targets, two of them, Kamijou and Kazakiri were here, protected by Anti-Skill.

The only one not there and not protected by Anti-Skill was—

“DAMN IT…INDEX!!!!”

Between the lines 2

The footsteps echoed inside the underground streets.

These weren’t the footsteps of a human. These were the footsteps of the 4m tall monster that was made of concrete and railroad tracks, the stone golem Ellis.

Cradled in Ellis’ arms, Sherry was waving her oil pastel, controlling Ellis’ feet. Where should she go, she was rather clear of it. Before creating the second Ellis,

Sherry had already used several mud eyes to grasp the target's location. But in order to create the second Ellis, she had already destroyed those eyeballs.

The face that took a punch was all numb. At first, the feet that were hidden underneath Sherry's skirt weren't touching the ground, but floating several centimeters in the air. Because of this, Sherry wasn't affected by the shockwaves created by Ellis. But after she got punched by that boy, even though the levitation spell absorbed the impact from the punch, the spell itself was destroyed. Thus, right now, Sherry could only let Ellis carry her away.

Sherry looked around, muttering.

It was so irritating to the eyes.

This underground space that was formed by concrete; this stinky, dusty and dirty air was really an eyesore.

The one who created this thing was really an eyesore. The force that was enough to create this was really an eyesore.

Sherry hated this city.

She hated the water of this city, the wind in this city, the land in this city, the fire in this city, everything and anything about this city. She wished for everyone in this city to disappear, to disappear from history; to disappear from human memory, to disappear from this world.

The face that got hit by the boy started to feel hot.

This city itself was the biggest reason for disaster, Sherry grumbled.

"Ellis."

Sherry said.

Originally, Ellis wasn't the name of this golem.

But the name of an esper who died at the age of 20.

Chapter 4: Stop Sign. *Beast_Body,_Human_Heart.*

Part 1

Compared to the dark underground, the scorching heat on the white surface was unbearable while they were under the bright white glare of the sun.

Index and Misaka Mikoto were on the street. Shirai Kuroko was busy saving the students trapped underground.

Kamijou and company hadn't arrived back yet, and it was a bit cruel to go home first. However, both of them didn't really have anything to talk about. Under the blue sky that was raining sunlight down, both of them could only maintain this intricate silence.

"Ah, really. This is all Kuroko's fault…"

Deep inside, Mikoto was cursing her kouhai who was not around. With the power of the Railgun, it was not impossible to destroy the walls in the underground streets, but she feared that this would allow the terrorist to escape, so she didn't dare to take action.

Maybe it couldn't endure the intense heat, as the calico cat struggled in Index's arms.

After a while, Index muttered,

"…It's so hot."

"Yeah."

Mikoto nodded her head in agreement.

“But what’s with your clothes anyway? Wearing long sleeves even in such hot weather…ah, are you afraid of your skin getting sunburned? I seem to have seen on the television before that people with skin with less pigment would get their skin all red and painful once their skin touch sunlight.”

“I’m not really mindful, and right now, these clothes are really airy.”

“Hm? Wha…your clothes are all full of safety pins! Why are you wearing such hot clothing?”

“Ugh…that brings up some old scars, so please don’t pursue this issue any further.”

Index interrupted the conversation, and so, the conversation was stopped again. But Mikoto, who tried to start the conversation once, was unable to hold on for long, and said,

“But they sure are slow.”

“…Hm. What to do. That magician seemed to be targeting Hyouka, and her spells have some indications of the London style. I hope she’s okay…”

“!?”

The rare term called ‘magician’ made Mikoto suspicious.

When Shirai Kuroko had teleported Index to the surface, Index didn’t say any thanks, but had quarreled with Shirai Kuroko, saying such words like ‘why did you bring me in first’, ‘hurry up and send me back inside’. At that time, Index did seem to mention this strange term called ‘magician’.

After thinking about it for a while, Mikoto decided not to pursue further. From Index’s clothing, it was obvious that she was a religious person. Maybe to the people without any scientific knowledge, powers were just like magic.

“Hyouka…is that the girl who was with you?”

“Mm. Ah, but this time it wasn’t Touma who found her first, I found her first.”

“…’not this time’ huh? Ho ho.”

Mikoto turned her head around and revealed a sinister smile. The innocent Index completely did not realize it at all, she just continued to hug Sphinx, shake her body left and right, and said,

“Uu, I’m a little worried here. Whether it’s because a girl is in such a dangerous place, or it’s because Touma’s alone with a girl, it’s still worrying.”

“…For some reason, I feel that we both agree on this point.”

Mikoto remained silent for a while, before continuing,

“Speaking of which, aren’t you worried about that guy’s safety?”

In a short instant, Index stopped what she was doing.

“Hm? Touma? There’s no need to worry about him. No matter what happens, Touma will always come back.”

Index said this, but there was a huge contradiction within it. If she was really not worried, why would she be waiting around in the hot sun?

(Sigh. Who wouldn’t be worried in this situation?)

Mikoto reflected on those words, causing the conversation to cease as she thought

(Did she just say ‘come back’?)

When she said ‘come back’, who did she mean he would ‘come back’ to? There was no need to question about it. Maybe this silver-haired girl didn’t mean much when she said it. However, this caused quite a shock to Mikoto because it implied that this thinking was due to the common understanding they had in their daily lives together, so there wasn’t much need to think about it.

Mikoto played with her bangs and thought,

(Why do I feel so uncomfortable about hearing this?)

The feeling created within Mikoto made her frown inadvertently.

At this moment, the calico cat suddenly meowed loudly and struggled out of

Index’s arms.

Index let out a shout, and Mikoto inadvertently turned over to look, and saw the calico cat struggle out of Index’s arms and land on the floor. Seemed like the cat couldn’t endure the heat as it ran away.

Index wanted to chase after the little escapee, but stopped halfway through. She frantically watched the cat run away, before looking back at Mikoto. Maybe she wanted to chase after the calico cat, but she was in a fix because she didn’t dare to leave the scene.

“No problem. I’ll stay here, you go get the cat back. My body’s nature causes cats to get irritated around me easily, so I can’t help you chase after it.”

“Thanks, if you were willing to help out, I’d be grate…hey, Sphinx!”

Index nodded at Mikoto thankfully before rushing towards the calico cat that had moved into the back alley behind a convenience store, soon disappearing behind it. So that cat was called Sphinx? Mikoto was speechless in regards to that strange name.

Suddenly, Mikoto felt the manhole beside her clattering slightly.

“Eh?”

Mikoto sounded puzzled as she let out an intrigued sound. After that, the neighboring juice vending machines started to sway about slightly as well. There was obviously no wind, yet the leaves were rustling.

This was some intriguing tremor. It didn’t feel like an earthquake, but more like a huge monster walking.

Mikoto wondered if the calico cat had used its sharp animal instincts to detect the tremor and thus ran away.

Part 2

Stunned, Kazakiri Hyouka was sitting inside the dark subway.

The flashing lights that were engraved in her eyes and the gunshots that nearly broke her eardrums had ceased. In order to prevent Sherry from escaping to the surface, Anti-Skill was using wireless radio to coordinate all over the place.

Suddenly, Kazakiri sensed that some people were quarrelling. Looking back, it was actually Kamijou quarrelling with a female Anti-Skill member. To be honest, Kamijou was so agitated that he wanted to punch her.

“Damn it! That woman’s no longer in the underground streets, so why can’t you remove the perimeter underground?”

“How many times must I explain it to you? The one in charge of the underground streets is someone different from us. We have already sent a request, but it’ll take some times before the orders reach, so there’s no way we can remove it so quickly!”

“DAMN IT!”

Kamijou cursed as he kicked against a wall. Seeing that, Kazakiri’s shoulders trembled. Kamijou didn’t look all right; the direct threat of Sherry wasn’t around, why was Kamijou looking so anxious?

The female Anti-Skill member who Kamijou was arguing with picked up the wireless radio. She got away from Kamijou and used some technical terms and heated words to argue with another person on the radio.

Kazakiri saw Kamijou standing alone, and like a magnet attracted to him, she walked towards him. Though she felt that he was scary, she felt that the him right now was like a child who would cry anytime soon, and couldn’t bear to leave him alone like that.

“…Ah…erm…just now, thank you…”

“Hm? It’s not something you need to give thanks for. Oh yeah, is your body alright?”

“Ah…mm…I guess it’s alright…erm…excuse me…but did something happen?”

On hearing these words, Kamijou remained silent. He was most likely hesitating whether he should say it or not. Finally, he slowly said it. He wasn't deliberately choosing his words, but slowly vomiting out all the emotion that was built up within him.

"Sherry Cromwell…that dirty looking gothic-clothed woman didn't escape, she went off to look for the next target, Index."

"Eh…?"

"Seems like she didn't come here to kill me nor you. As long as the conditions are met, she will kill anyone. And Index is one of us."

Kazakiri gasped. Thinking back about it, that blond lady had mentioned it before. There were many Anti-Skill members beside Kazakiri and Kamijou, but right now, Index was unguarded. If anyone could be chosen, of course the logical answer was to choose the unguarded one. "I tried to negotiate with Anti-Skill, but the lock on the underground streets can't be removed. Damn it, if that thick wall won't open, I can't get out at all!"

"…But…but…even so…why can't you just tell them? There are many Anti-Skill members out there…so you just need to ask them to help protect Index…"

"No way."

Without hesitation, Kamijou denied what seemed like a logical proposal.

"Wh…why?"

"Index isn't a citizen of this city. If Anti-Skill sees her, they won't even protect her, she might even get arrested…of course that's just likelihood."

Kamijou suppressed his voice as he said,

"Though she has a temporary ID, since it's red alert now, I can't guarantee that it's effective now. In this situation, it's not unreasonable even if one's asked to show a driver's license, credit card or other forms of identification."

Saying all the way till here, he let his jaw drop.

“This is bad. To be honest, she doesn’t have a ‘meaningful form of identification’. Forget about a credit card, insurance certificate or ID, she doesn’t even have any records of age, blood type or even birthday. Besides, anyone can tell that this name called Index is a fake name. Anti-Skill is looking for ‘suspicious people from the outside world’, how can they let off this unknown person?”

At that moment, Kazakiri finally realized the reason Kamijou was acting so panicky. Though there were many citizens in this city, compared to Kazakiri Hyouka, Index’s companions were overwhelmingly less.

“Bu…but…I can’t be counted as a citizen of this city…”

“Your situation is different from Index. Though it’s true that you don’t have an Academy City pass, that’s all it is. Though your real identity isn’t that much different from normal humans, you may not be a dangerous person. However, Index is different. Basically, she belongs to a different group from Academy City. And just this alone is enough to designate her as dangerous person.”

After saying that, Kamijou suddenly moved forward. Kazakiri followed him from behind.

Kamijou was heading towards the large hole that the blond lady had escaped from.

“Seems like we can only escape from here. Damn it, if the wall nearby can open, I can easily cut them off and don’t have to lose the initiative by playing catch up from behind!”

Kazakiri stared at the huge hole.

It was pitched black, there was no light at all, so it was impossible to see the bottom. Who knew how many meters deep the hole was, could anyone really jump in? One couldn’t even grasp the timing to reduce the impact.

“Wai…wait a minute…you really…intend to go down alone…?”

Kazakiri felt that even if they wanted to take some risks, they should contact Anti-Skill first. As her own body had gotten damaged a few times, Kazakiri understood the terror that blond lady brought.

No matter what, it was not an enemy an ordinary high school student could take on without a plan.

Thinking of which, Kamijou should be clear about this. The reason why he had been able to win just now was because of Anti-Skill's help. If it were one on one, it was likely that even a tank alone was not going to beat that stone figure. That was a real ‘monster’.

But even so, Kamijou did not waver.

Even if he hid ‘an enemy to Academy City on purpose’, for whatever reason, one thing that was obvious was that Kamijou would continue to protect that girl.

Kazakiri also understood that feeling. To Kazakiri, Index was the first precious friend that she had ever made. Just thinking of the possibility of losing that friend, or that friend getting hurt, it made her tremble.

However…

That didn’t mean that the boy could just go ahead on a suicide-like run.

Kamijou definitely wouldn’t want to lose Index, and Kazakiri herself definitely wouldn’t want to lose these two people.

They had to protect Index from that monster.

She couldn’t let Kamijou Touma fight against it.

Was there a way to settle these two contradicting things? Kazakiri pondered for a while, before pausing.

There was a way.

“…Don’t worry…even if you don’t go…there’s a way to save her.”

On hearing this, Kamijou frowned in shock.

Kazakiri then explained,

“Let a monster…handle another monster…”

Kamijou gasped. Kazakiri herself however revealed a smile.

“Even though…I don’t think I can beat that monster…at least I can become bait…once I get attacked by the monster, I can create a chance for her to escape…since I’m a monster as well. I can only…offer such help…”

Kamijou was shocked on hearing such words.

Afterwards, his expression changed from shock into anger.

“WHY ARE YOU SAYING SUCH WORDS LISTEN, IF YOU WANT ME TO PUT IT PLAINLY FOR YOU TO HEAR, I’LL EXPLAIN IT TO YOU CLEARLY: YOU ARE NOT A MONSTER! WHY DO YOU THINK WE CAME ALL THE WAY HERE, PLEASE, THINK ABOUT IT, WHY CAN’T YOU UNDERSTAND IT!?”

The tone was extremely sincere, there was no pretense in it. Kazakiri was extremely touched by his rage over her own negativity.

“DO YOU THINK I’LL BE HAPPY IF YOU DID SUCH A THING? DO I LOOK LIKE SOMEONE LIKE THAT? DO YOU THINK THAT WHEN THAT MONSTER BEAT YOU DOWN, THAT INDEX WILL RUN AWAY? STOP JOKING AROUND! EVEN IF YOU ABANDON US, WE WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU! NO WAY WILL WE DO THAT!”

But Kamijou himself didn’t realize it.

The stone golem that Anti-Skill and Kamijou were fighting in order to protect Hyouka was a monster like Kazakiri Hyouka. That monster had been attacked by cannon fire, and finally crumbled on the floor, scattered all over.

They had seen the remains of the monster, yet they never felt any pity.

In the end, ‘those things that weren’t human’ end up like that.

“…However, never mind…I’ll be the monster…”

Looking straight at Kamijou, Kazakiri said,

“For I am something intangible…I won’t die no matter how many times I get

beaten down…for I am a monster, I have power to fight against that stone golem…”

At that moment, Kazakiri paused, then continued,

“I can…use my own power to protect those important to me…so, I’m glad that I’m a monster.”

With a gentle smile, Kazakiri Hyouka walked towards the edge of the huge hole that Sherry Cromwell had made and jumped down. Kamijou shouted out loud, frantically trying to grab Hyouka, however, he froze halfway through. Maybe it was because he hadn’t thought through it, but that was the right hand that Kamijou was so used to using.

The absolute hand that would erase any monster the moment he touched.

Deep inside, Kamijou was somewhat aware of it.

Kazakiri’s body continued to descend with the effects of gravity. Midway through, she smiled at Kamijou as if saying to Kamijou while he was rebuking himself over pulling his arm back: 'this isn’t your fault'.

The monster descended into the darkness.

She could finally find shelter at the end of the world as she continued to sink down into the darkness.

Part 3

The moment she landed inside the dark hole, Kazakiri Hyouka’s feet let out a terrifying sound.

It was an underground rail track, and the depth of the hole was a lot deeper than expected, and because of the tracks on the floor, the floor was extremely uneven, so it was hard to cushion the impact. If Kazakiri were just a normal human, the

bones in her ankles would have been crushed and she would be rolling on the floor in pain.

That was right, if she were a normal human.

But even though Kazakiri's feet had let out such a terrifying sound, even though she felt some pain, the pain disappeared after 5 seconds. She tried to tap her toes as if she was trying on new shoes. The injuries were already healed, and an incredible strength filled her up as if the spinning gears were finally connected to each other. That gear that she once lacked should be called 'her real identity'.

Kazakiri ran within the darkness.

It wasn't a place that was originally designed for humans to walk in, so it was a lot darker than the underground streets, and dirty. There was a row of concrete pillars dividing the path into two, one going up and one going down. Following the lights that looked like they would be extinguished at any time, she continued to move forward. She was aware of where she should head towards. There was a set of visible footprints on the floor, like those imprinted on a snowy land. Those were likely left behind by that heavyweight stone golem.

As if she was trying to rip the polluted air apart, Kazakiri continued to run forward.

Every time she saw a rare source of light illuminating the place, the fragments of her memories appeared within her mind.

She wasn't a human.

On a certain day 10 years ago.

When Kazakiri Hyouka had finally gained consciousness, she was already standing in the middle of the 'city'.

The 'city' didn't mean Academy City. But in terms of coordinates, the location was completely identical to Academy City. It was a place built by the AIM diffusion field released by the 2.3 million espers within Academy City, the invisible 'City of Shimmers'.

'The City of Shimmers' had no shadows, no weight, no air flow, it was extremely

thin, there was no sense of existence. Once the wind blows, the towers, trees on the road and pedestrians would be blown away like the flame on a candle wick, and let out a grey visual signal that looked like a bug that mistook the camouflage color.

If there was anyone who could visualize an AIM diffusion field, the person would find that the 'City of Shimmers' completely overlapped Academy City.

The things that the AIM diffusion field created didn't just include Kazakiri Hyouka. It included buildings, streets, trees, vehicles, crowds, everything. Kazakiri Hyouka was just someone created by the AIM diffusion field, residing within the city created by it.

—Her memories were like fragments peeling off, recovering, bit by bit.

—At the same time, the bonds restraining her were being released, one by one.

Even now, she didn't know why she stood there within the 'City of Shimmers'.

Sometimes, Kazakiri Hyouka would find herself standing on the road as if she had just woke up from a daydream. Looking at the things she had on her, she knew her personal particulars like her name, address, telephone number.

Other than that, there was no way to understand the current situation.

The passers-by around her wouldn't tell her anything.

In truth, these passers-by were rather mysterious. Basically, these people's looks would change according to the setting, like when the shop attendant of a convenience store was about to wipe a glass window, the shop attendant would instantly change into a cleaner. And after wiping the window, the cleaner would change into a child taking an ice cream to the cashier. After that, the child would change into a housewife taking out her purse.

—Maybe it was because the 'humans' she knew of had become 'monsters'.

—Like a limiter being removed, or rather, she could use all her power, all her strength rose up within her.

Everyone in the city was like that. The appearances, personalities and memories

would change according to the setting. In truth, when Kazakiri had walked up to the mailman to talk to him, the mailman had changed into a traffic policeman. Even if it was an office woman or a female high school student, they would become middle-aged policemen. Also, everyone's replies were rather blank.

Seeing these people that would change 'just to answer Kazakiri Hyouka's question', Kazakiri started to feel afraid. It was as if her actions would affect these people's flesh and souls.

—BOOM! Every step she took, there would be a shockwave spreading on the floor.

—It was no longer a weight a human should have, and the muscles controlling this weight had already exceeded what the ordinary human could do.

In the beginning, Kazakiri didn’t understand why she was the only one without any ‘changes’, but after a while, she slightly understood the reason. The people in this city would change their appearance in order to do their ‘duty’. On the other hand, if they didn’t do their ‘duty’, they wouldn’t do anything, and the entire city would stop functioning.

And Kazakiri's identity was that of a source. For example, when she walked into a convenience store, intending to buy a bottled beverage, the convenience store attendant would start to work, the beverage would start to run, the electric generator would run, allowing the ice box to create ice, the factory producing the beverage would start, and the bottle recycling company would start to work. The people in this city were all ‘gears’, they could only link together with the power of the ‘source’, Kazakiri, before finally causing this huge intricate machinery called the city to run. Kazakiri herself wasn’t the master of this system, just a source. In other words, she was also a part of this system.

Kazakiri Hyouka was scared.

Because these people weren’t puppets without life, but humans who really had lives.

No matter whether she went forward or backwards, she would completely change other people’s lives. Understanding this, Kazakiri couldn’t move at all. To her, the duty entrusted to her was too heavy.

—BAM! Her head collided against a pillar in the subway.

—However, she was unscathed. In contrast, the concrete pillar let out a cracking sound before collapsing.

Because of fear, she had wanted to escape from the ‘City of Shimmers’.

But if she took any action, it was likely that she would get others involved as well. Thus, Kazakiri could only stand around like a phantom, using her eyes to observe that same city that she couldn’t touch—Academy City.

The people in Academy City couldn’t sense her presence. Even if she was to stand in front of the students in Academy City and reach her hand out, she would pass through them. No matter how close the smiles of these students were, Kazakiri was unable to join in with the students.

Kazakiri understood that. However, she still continued to try and talk to the people of Academy City. Once she could escape into the ‘outside’ of this same place, Academy City, she wouldn’t affect the people in the ‘City of Shimmers’. So even though she knew that she couldn’t do it, she still tried all sorts of means to do it.

Even though she wouldn’t get a reply, even though no one would realize it.

Even though it may end up in sadness.

Because of that, when she had managed to touch the shoulder of the white nun in that school successfully, she had been surprised.

—In this originally hollow body, there seemed to be something rising up within her.

—Right now, she wouldn’t lose to a train on the railroad tracks in terms of speed.

In this place that she didn’t know of, who knew how many coincidences overlapped to allow her to interact happily with others.

To her, this was already the most precious thing to her, even if she had to seal her memories of being a monster.

But right now, Kazakiri Hyouka had released this precious thing.

In order to protect something even more important that she couldn't lose.

Kazakiri Hyouka dashed down the tracks like a bullet.

Anyone would be scared if they saw her run at this speed.

Of course, fighting against that monster was something really scary. It wasn't a prediction, but a real experience. The pain of her arms and legs being cut off, her body felt like a rag cloth being twisted. She couldn't die even if she wanted to, the sense of weakness she felt when she rolled about on the dirty ground.

But more importantly, Kazakiri was afraid of the fear that her good friend Index would have when she saw her as a monster.

(It's alright even if it's like this…)

Kazakiri didn't stop at all, her eyes looking in front.

The first and last moment when she had spent time together with Kamijou and Index after school made Kazakiri feel really happy.

So happy that she wanted to cry. If possible, she wanted to continue staying in that world forever. Just thinking about the fact that she wouldn't be able to stay with them together again made the warmth in her fingers disappear. She had finally managed to leave the 'City of Shimmers', and right now, it seemed meaningless.

(…I…)

But, because she was afraid of losing it, she wanted to protect those important to her.

Even though she knew that she wouldn't be able to see the smiles on her friends' faces,

Kazakiri Hyouka still wanted to protect their world.

(I must…!)

She abandoned her identity as a human, turned into a monster, and continued to run within the darkness. Inside that hollow body, there seemed to be something invisible rising within her.

I must go, Kazakiri Hyouka made this determination.

I must go protect my most important friends.

Part 4

The calico cat tried its best to run away, and Index tried her best to pursue.

Running into the dark corner of the back alley behind the convenience store, the cat was scared into scampering all around on seeing Index chase after it. Ducking underneath the cars that were parked on the roads, jumping past metal fences, running from one alley to another. Finally, the cat ran into an abandoned pile of debris.

"Got you!"

At that moment, Index grabbed the calico cat's neck.

Maybe it was because it was facing a girl that was panting yet growling, or maybe it was animal instincts that the cat continued to struggle in her arms as it again tried to get away. Actually, if it hadn't been for Index shouting as she chased after it, the cat probably wouldn't have ran so far.

The calico cat continued to meow loudly in Index's arms, as if saying 'it's so hot, please don't hold me so tightly'. Index however continued to hug the cat tightly as she looked around.

It was truly a wasteland.

In terms of location, it should be similar to the insides of an alley. There were many rather short buildings that were used for business, but these buildings

seemed to be fated for demolition, the signboards were taken down, the glass windows were all gone, and even the doors were gone, leaving behind a huge gaping hole. Looking inside the hole, all the decorations were all stripped bare, leaving behind the bare pillars.

Seemed like the owner of the land here intended to remove all the buildings and build some major facility here.

Not intending to give up, the calico cat continued to swing its short, plump legs about as it tried to escape into the debris. Index puffed her cheeks angrily and said,

"Humph, if you're not going to be obedient, I'm going to make you suffer a bit!"

Index blew some air into the calico cat's ear, and the cat seemed like it hated this feeling as it shrieked and trembled. In an instant, it even reached its claws out in reflex, but maybe it was feeling a bit merciful as the calico cat retracted its claws.

"Come on, let's go find that short-haired girl, shall we?"

Index said, and the calico cat purred in an unwilling manner.

At that moment,

The calico cat suddenly lifted its head and then again started to struggle, trying to get away from Index's wrists. And this time, it struggled with a lot more force. Index panicked, wondering if she had used too much force, but after using several methods, the calico cat still didn't calm down at all.

Suddenly, Index felt something land on her head.

"!?"

Lifting her hands up and touching her head, it was actually powdered concrete. Looking up, the powder came from the eroded walls of the abandoned buildings.

Afterward, the manhole covers started to tremble, letting out a rattling sound.

"...The floor seems to be shaking, no?"

Index felt extremely suspicious, but she suddenly remembered that that London-style magic may be hidden underground, in other words, beside her feet.

Like a living thing, the ground instantly rumbled.

"!?"

Index frantically jumped back, and at that moment, the place where she had been standing exploded. A gigantic monster's arm reached up from the epicenter of the explosion. The height alone was about 2m, and it looked like a dinosaur with a really long neck, blocking Index.

A large amount of debris scattered from the ground.

A block of asphalt that was larger than Index's head fizzed past her head. She frantically ducked, hugging the cat at her abdomen. Numerous pieces of debris zipped past her, like a swarm of bees flying by, and barely missed hitting her head.

Pa pa pa pa pa! The debris splattered onto the building behind her like a torrent of rain, making a terrifying sound.

Index did not look back, but straight forward. In front of her, a huge stone golem slowly climbed out of the ground, like an undead climbing out from a grave. She couldn't see the caster, so most likely, it was being controlled from afar.

Index silently narrowed her eyes.

The vast amount of knowledge of the magical Index of the 0th Parish of the Anglican Church, Necessarius, subconsciously appeared in her mind. After a little tidying up of information, she already understood the identity of the enemy in front of her.

(The basis is of Kabbalah. The main use is to defend and remove any enemy presence. The birth year was from the 16th Century, according to Gershom Scholem's explanation, the nature is of tangibility and formlessness) (Gershom Scholem, formerly known as Gerhard Scholem, 1897-1982, a Palestinian thinker who was born in Germany, and later converted to Israeli in 1948, He is widely regarded as the founder of the modern, academic study of Kabbalah, becoming the first Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.)

Speaking of stone golems, many people would imagine them as being made of stone or dirt, stupid and slow monsters. But in truth, that was not the case.

In the ideology of the Kabbalah, humans were created by God through dirt. And the poor copies that humans made with their own hands were stone golems. In other words, stone golems were 'clones that weren't created properly', so their nature was similar to those wooden puppets in fairy tales.

(The original spell was improved by combining with Anglican spells; Linguistic system changed from Hebrew to English, and all the body parts are made to react to the Cross. It's more like cloning an angel than a human.)

However, this stone golem didn't have the structure of an ordinary human.

Seemed like the caster wanted to create something of an even higher existence than a human, that was an angel that looked like a human from the outside. The head, right arm, left arm, legs were all created in the image of a Cross, each side assigned with the power of the four archangels, or maybe the caster wanted to create an even stronger dirt angel.

The only good thing was that there was a limit to human abilities, so even with human hands, it was impossible to create a perfect angel. It was like trying to create a perfect Angel of Water, it was impossible for humans to accomplish this.

But even an incomplete angel was still a dangerous thing.

BOOM! The footsteps of the stone golem rumbled the ground.

Index hugged the calico cat tightly and took a step back.

There was no chance of winning if one was to fight straight from the front. Normally speaking, this kind of stone golem would have a ‘secret code’ as a safety feature. By stroking it a bit with a finger, the stone golem functions would cease, preventing the stone golem from going rampant. But the enemy was no amateur, this weakness would definitely not be located at a place where others could touch. Most likely, the ‘secret code’ should be within the body, surrounded by the exoskeleton of the stone golem.

Index was unable to use magic, and didn’t have any superpowers. She didn’t have any inexplicable powers at all, her arms were weaker than ordinary

humans. Facing this girl who only had a vast amount of ‘knowledge’ in her mind, the stone golem raised its arm without mercy.

BOOM! Forget about the air, the fist that could crush even space swung over. The girl took a slight breath.

“T T T L—turn to the left.”

She then said this.

Immediately, the fist of the stone golem that was swinging down suddenly curled left like a snake. The stone golem’s fist swept past an empty space. Index glanced from the corner of her eyes and took a step forward, standing beside the stone golem.

The stone golem quickly turned, its fist was swung horizontally.

“C F A—Turn upwards.”

But the strike changed trajectory as well, passing above Index’s head.

Just as the stone golem wanted to swing its fist again,

“P I O B T L L—Turn the left foot to the left.”

The stone golem’s leg suddenly ignored its balance and stepped backwards, and due to the fist that was raised high, the stone golem lost balance and slammed hard backwards.

Index took another 2, 3 light steps back.

The language she was speaking in was a quick Kabbalah reading method, it was a unique pronunciation method of only using the first letter, with the aim of turning it into a code and making it quicker to read.

Though Index had a vast amount of knowledge, she didn’t have any ability to create magic, so she couldn’t use magic. But to anyone who was seeing this right now, it was likely that they wouldn’t view her as any different from other real magicians.

The stone golem stood up and ran over to close the distance to Index, its fist swinging over like a cannonball. The girl muttered, and just like that, the stone golem's fist again changed trajectory, sweeping in a completely different direction.

It was as if the orders Index was giving were interfering with the stone golem's actions. In other words, it was interfering with the orders the caster's giving, a forced enchanting.

Spell Intercept.

The logic behind it was simple, the caster would think of a magic command code, so by letting the caster's mind become confused, the caster's control of magic would be obstructed. It was like a person counting down in his mind, if someone spouted some random numbers, he would be affected.

Index couldn't use magic.

But she could try to let the opposing magician self-destruct.

Though the caster of the spell wasn't around, according to Index's analysis of the spell structure, she felt that the stone golem was not automated, but controlled from a distance. In other words, the caster was using the five senses of the stone golem to observe every single action Index made. If so, there was a chance.

"C R B B F T T N A T W I T O D—Alter to the right, cross both legs, turn neck and hip in opposite directions."

The stone golem continued to swing its fist, and Index shouted commands even more quickly. Like a drunkard that was blindfolded, the stone golem's fist continued to say hello to unrelated areas.

(Just evading alone…isn't going to be enough!)

Index took off all the safety pins on the skirt of her nun's habit. The nun's habit became a high-cut cheongsam, her entire thigh was revealed, but there was no time to care about that.

She was holding onto a safety pin, staring intently at the stone golem.

It was a bit plain to use such a weapon against a huge stone golem.

(Reverse-engineering self-regeneration formula, time period is approximately 3 seconds. If I want to make use of it…there!)

Index tossed the safety pin at the stone golem without any hesitation. The safety pin was rather slow, and forget about a stone armor, it couldn't even prick a human's skin. The safety pin arced and bounced onto the stone golem's leg. After that, it was sucked into the stone golem's body like a magnetic attraction.

In an instant.

Like a wedge that was hammered into a joint, the right ankle of the giant stone golem was somewhat stifled.

It was somewhat similar to the Spell Intercept. The stone golem had the ability to use anything around it to assimilate into itself and repair any wounds. On the other hand, if things that were unnecessary or even harmful to the structure were thrown to it, the self-repair system would have an error. An example would be leaving a fractured wrist alone and not doing anything to it, leaving it in a weird shape.

103,000 magical grimoires lay in slumber within Index.

But just knowledge alone was meaningless, the most important thing was to apply it and find the most suitable solution within the shortest time.

Maybe I can win, Index thought as she started to back away. Her Spell Intercept wasn't one universal solution, it was completely useless against completely unknown spells like an alchemist's Ars Magna or equipment like Yamisaka Ouma's bow of Azusa that could replace spell enchantments. However, there was no such problem with this golem. The Spell Intercept could definitely interfere with the stone golem's actions, and by skillfully using the safety pins, they could damage the stone golem. Index thought that as long as she continued to interfere, maybe there was a chance to destroy the entire structure and cause the stone golem to crumble.

"YAHH…!"

The sudden shock caused Index to tumble onto the ground. She unintentionally

let her jaw drop. Even if she could interfere with the enemy's actions, she couldn't avoid such an attack that shook the entire ground.

The stone golem dragged its stone leg and slowly walked towards Index, who was sprawled onto the ground.

"C R—right…!"

Index shouted halfway through, but the stone golem raised its two fists and let them clash against each other.

BAM! The huge impact rattled Index's ears. Her words were cut off midway through, and the calico cat in her arms purred in agony due to the deafening pain.

The stone golem again raised its fist.

Index hugged the calico cat and rolled onto the floor, trying to pull her distance away and shouted,

"M B F P A D C O G—Let both legs be positioned in parallel and lose balance!"

The stone golem heard Index's voice, and only shook its head slightly. After that, it looked like it just switched off, ignoring Index's commands.

(No…! Long distance manipulation has been switched to automated mode…!)

If there was no caster, Index's Spell Intercept wouldn't work. Her orders could only work on humans, it couldn't work on inorganic matter that didn't have any thought process.

The stone golem's giant fist sliced the air as it cut through.

Index was already unable to stop its attack.

The blunt sound of flesh being slammed hard onto the concrete floor could be heard.

Part 5

Kamijou finally managed to move through the hole and into the underground passage.

It would have taken too much time if he had needed to find something that could be used as rope. He let go of the thick fire hose and continued to run through the dark passage.

(Damn it! These guys always like to make things difficult for me! It's already so difficult and yet they're making things even more difficult!)

Ellis' footprints could be seen everywhere on the concrete floor. Looking down through the dark passage, he couldn't see Kazakiri Hyouka, nor could he hear any footsteps.

After thinking of the last smile that Kazakiri had left behind, Kamijou tightly gripped his own fist.

A hand that slays.

A dream bubble like girl that would disappear on being touched.

(Can't let it end like this. I can't let it end on such a stupid note!)

Though Kazakiri had said that she voluntarily became a monster, that wasn't the case. She really wasn't human, but she shouldn't be considered a monster.

Was it because Kazakiri wasn't human that she couldn't even shout for help?

Was she limited in tears such that she could only endure this pain silently?

(It…shouldn't be like this!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth as he moved forward.

There were rectangular concrete pillars on the underground train track, separating the uplink and the downlink. No matter how much he ran, Kamijou

would always see the same thing, making him feel extremely frustrated.

Suddenly, the pillar besides him collapsed.

It was like a giant's hand pushing a block down; and it was obviously not a natural phenomenon.

"Cheh…!"

Kamijou saw the pillar fall towards him and hastily jumped sideways. A terrifying collision sound could be heard, and the dust scattered from the concrete.

"As expected, you won't be finished off just like that…"

A voice could be heard through the darkness. Kamijou coughed as he turns his head around. Dressed dirtily and dragging her feet, Sherry Cromwell was standing in front of him.

Both of them were about 10m from each other.

Kamijou frowned. Sherry, who signified violence, had disappeared.

"Ho…hoho…hohohoho. I let Ellis go on first. Now, Ellis may have found his target, huh? Maybe he might have turned it into rubble."

"You…you bastard…!"

Kamijou lowered his body and clenched his fist.

Sherry could control Ellis without the need for chalk. However, it felt like a dual-screen broadcast on a television, it was rather draining mentally.

Once she saw Kamijou's reaction, Sherry smiled.

"That's right, that's the way. I'll play with you here and won't let you find Ellis."

On hearing these words, Kamijou finally understood Sherry's intentions. She wanted to restrain Kamijou here, the only person who had a way to beat Ellis.

Kazakiri Hyouka should have passed through this place, but there was no sign of

her.

Maybe Sherry had purposely let her off. Kazakiri should be one of the targets, but Sherry gave up rather well, intending to focus on Index alone.

Also, it seemed that to Sherry, Kamijou was the only opponent for her. As she didn't have time to care about others, the magician let Kazakiri go.

Kamijou remembered what Sherry had said.

"I need something that will cause a war to start, so I have to let a lot more people know. I'm from the Anglican Church, understand that—ELLIS!!"

Since Sherry wanted to create such a huge commotion in Academy City, it was a hassle to ask her who the Anglican Church wanted to fight with.

However, was that really what the Anglican Church was thinking?

At least, Tsuchimikado, Kanzaki and Stiyl shouldn't have had this intention.

"…What are you planning to do? I don't know what's really going on, but isn't there a balance between the magic and science sides? Why are you challenging us on purpose? What's the meaning behind this?"

Hearing Kamijou's question, Sherry just smiled.

She laughed mockingly,

"I don't know if you have heard of how espers' bodies will corrode if they try to use magic?"

"What?"

That answer didn't match the question and made Kamijou frown.

"Don't you find it strange? Why does everyone know about this?"

Sherry's words pierced Kamijou bit by bit.

"Because we tried it before. About 20 years ago, the Anglican Church and Academy City each had a certain group of people that wanted to work together.

We gathered all our technology and knowledge in one place to try and combine powers and magic to create a new form of spellcaster, and in the end…”

Without listening to the end, Kamijou could guess the outcome.

Once the espers tried to use magic, their bodies would self-destruct. The ‘Misawa Cram School’ students and Tsuchimikado were the best examples.

“Then what happened after they tried…?”

“Sort of annihilated. The higher ups of the Anglican Church realised that we were in contact with the science side, so they started to hunt us down. Just the fact that we were exchanging knowledge and technology was enough to be a reason for us to be hunted down.”

Kamijou remained silent.

Trying to let science work together with magic, or trying to prevent science from working with magic, these weren’t meant to hurt others.

“Ellis was my friend.”

Sherry muttered.

“At that time, Ellis was one of the espers that Academy City sent in.”

Kamijou frowned. Ellis was also the name of that stone golem. If so, what was Sherry feeling while she called the stone golem Ellis? Most likely, only Sherry knew this feeling.

“Ellis was covered in blood after he cast a spell that I taught him. After that, the ‘knights’ rushed in with the intention of annihilating us. In order to help me escape, Ellis got hammered down by the knights.”

The dark subway was as silent as a chapel.

Sherry said slowly,

“We have to maintain a clear distance from you people, otherwise, forget about arguments and conflicts, just wanting to understand each other would cause

misfortune. If the magicians and scientists can’t live together, the same tragedy will occur once again.”

Thus, there had to be a war.

“Damn it, this is too unreasonable. You want to start a war to protect both sides? No, in fact, you really don’t want to start a war, right? You would have completed your objective even if you don’t seriously start a war. Can’t you just make both sides feel that ‘seems like a war is starting’ or ‘danger’s right at our doorstep’?”

“You smart-alec brat, what do you know? Stop looking at me with that expression.”

Though Sherry denied it, Kamijou firmly believed in his idea. To avoid having both magicians and scientists have a decisive conflict against each other, even her oxymoronic request could be achieved without the need to trigger a war. Both sides just needed to grasp each other’s taboos and not try to understand each other.

At least what he could be sure of was that two groups that had no common point wouldn’t be able to create either love or hatred.

With this, not only would they not stand off against each other.

It could also prevent the friction caused by trying to work with each other.

‘Magicians and scientists should be far away from one another’—maybe Sherry’s theory was correct, and whatever Kamijou’s argument may be, it may come off as selfish and stubborn. However, Kamijou was unable to accept Sherry’s view no matter what.

Because if that really happened, he would be separated from Index.

No, in order to create the ‘spark’, she would be killed.

Though it may have sounded stupid and self-centered.

Kamijou was unable to let go of this no matter what.

No matter what.

Sherry Cromwell pulled out a piece of white oil pastel from her tattered robe. Wary, Kamijou watched every single action that her fingers did, feeling suspicious in the meantime. If what Sherry said was true, she should be unable to create 2 stone golems. And after sealing off Ellis, Kamijou was able to punch Sherry away, which showed that Sherry had no spells that were stronger than Ellis.

Suddenly, Sherry shook her messy hair and said in delight,

“Hoho, can’t believe that you didn’t figure it out. Good thing this place is dark.”

“What?”

Kamijou inadvertently asked back. Sherry slightly swayed the oil pastel in her hand. Right now, she was unable to create any stone golems, and even if she was to write texts on the floor or the walls, it would only cause the place to collapse.

“Oh my? Don’t you find it strange? It’s so dark here, so why would I choose to appear here and even talk with you for a long time? Normally speaking, wouldn’t it be more effective for me to carry out an ambush by hiding in the darkness and waiting for you to move through?”

Kamijou was shocked and speechless. Right now, the only thing Sherry could do was to bring down the wall beside her hand. Both of them were about 10m from each other, so it should be safe.

“Oh yes, about this place. Now why would I choose this place? There’s only one road here, and you can’t possibility miss it. Now why would I specially wait for you here?”

But if that theory was correct, how had she caused the pillar beside Kamijou to collapse a while back?

“Basically, this is it! Watch this!”

Shua! Sherry swung the oil pastel along horizontally at a speed as if she was cutting the air.

Suddenly, the entire underground road let out a dim glow.

(This is…?)

Kamijou was shocked. Actually, the walls, ceiling, all the places that could be seen had markings that Sherry had drawn with her oil pastel, including the areas behind Kamijou and Sherry. Though it didn't extend out to the entire subway, at least the markings covered about 100m in distance.

There were numerous magic arrays even on the floor, like raindrops from a ceiling.

(Oh no…this magic array, don't tell me it's Ellis…!)

Kamijou couldn't help but tremble. Looking closely, all the magic arrays that covered the road were of similar shapes, they looked like tiles.

According to Sherry, she couldn't create 2 stone golems at the same time. If that was the case, there couldn't possibility be a new Ellis appearing here.

But what was Sherry planning? To run all the way here…

If the magic array to create a stone golem failed, it seemed like it would cause the floor to collapse. Right now, the magic arrays covered the entire road, and that meant…

(Damn it…does she intend to cause the entire tunnel to collapse?)

It was said that to demolish and blow up a building, they wouldn't use a huge explosive, but would set up many small ones all over the building before triggering them all. These magic arrays had a similar effect.

How many magic arrays were there? Assuming that every magic array was about 1m in diameter, just arranging them all, there would be 100 of them. The walls and ceiling were all crammed with magic arrays, and who knew how many there were. If they were all independent spells, it was impossible to negate all the magic arrays just by touching one or two of them.

So Sherry had stayed here with the intention of preparing this. By setting up this trap, she didn't even need to get near Kamijou, she could just cause the

surrounding area to collapse with a single order.

“The earth is my companion. The darkness surrounded by the earth is my stronghold.”

Sherry Cromwell said in a singing like manner.

Since Sherry had drawn so many magic arrays, once the order was executed, she should be caught up in the collapse as well. but she would most definitely have created many escape routes. Maybe the rubble would avoid her and create an oval-shaped safe zone.

Maybe the way the place would collapse would be well-planned, just nicely creating an exit to the surface.

“Cheh…!”

Kamijou slackened his jaw. Right now, it was too late to escape behind or run towards Sherry. Since the enemy had already set up a trap, she would not be so nice so as to prepare an escape route.

Seemed like even Kamijou’s anxiousness was within Sherry’s expectations. She just shouted out confidently,

“COLLAPSE LIKE A MUD PUPPET!!”

In response to the shout, the magic arrays nearby let out even more light. The entire path was like a snake’s stomach, moving along slowly and disgustingly.

(Damn it…what to do…?)

He would definitely die if he was unable to escape. The magic arrays that covered the entire place couldn’t be erased one by one with his right hand. Besides, he couldn’t even touch those magic arrays on the ceiling. Even if he was to negate the magic arrays on the walls and floor, if he couldn’t even prevent the most dangerous part—the ceiling from collapsing, he would still be buried alive anyway.

Thinking about this, Kamijou suddenly stopped.

The magic array on the floor?

“SWALLOW THE FOOL IN FRONT OF ME! BURY HIM INTO THE MUD! I WANT TO USE HIS FLESH AND BLOOD TO CREATE YOUR BODY!”

Sherry shouted as if she was pressing down the final trigger.

The walls and ceiling started to crack, like a balloon expanding from within. In truth, it was because the vulnerable ceiling was unable to withstand the overwhelming weight of the gravel.

“Ugh—!”

Kamijou rushed forward while the cracking balloon-like ceiling looked like it was about to break. He had only one goal—where the caster, Sherry was standing. It was likely the only safe zone, but no matter what, it was impossible for Kamijou to get there with his feet alone.

“Thus, my target’s not there!”

Kamijou clenched his fist, bending down as he continued to run, staying close to the ground. He had only one target, not Sherry Cromwell, but a certain magic array that was extremely close to him.

Kamijou remembered what Index had been grumbling about in the cafeteria.

“Hey, Touma, do you know? During English rituals, when one wants to cast an original spell on a Cross-like idol that’s infused with Telesma, the inside of the Chapel and the position of the caster are very important! In fact, the caster will create a defensive barrier to prevent the body from being damaged. The set-up and positioning are important, once they deviate from the original position, the secondary defensive spell will be affected by the main spell and will be unable to work. Touma, do you know the golden ratio? Say it, it’s common knowledge.”

(That magic array is the only one without any significance!)

That was right, the magic arrays on the walls and ceilings were meant to cause the subway to collapse, burying Kamijou alive. This could be understood.

But why would there be a need for a magic array on the floor? Even if the floor was destroyed, it couldn’t bury Kamijou alive.

(If so, that magic array is the only one with a different purpose!)

Understanding Kamijou's intention, Sherry Cromwell's expression changed as she frantically waved her oil pastel to give a command to the surrounding walls and ceiling. However, it was too late. Kamijou avoided the collapsing wall, passed through the tilted pillar, aimed at the magic array on the floor and raised his right hand.

After that, he hit it without hesitation.

Like water stains after a block of ice was broken, the magic array vanished without a trace.

Another pivotal spell to Sherry's plans had vanished.

If that magic array was meant to create a safe zone in this collapsing situation and protect her own life, if it disappeared now, she wouldn't dare to command a collapse.

"Cheh!"

Sherry hastily raised her oil pastel and waved it in the air. The ceiling that looked like it would collapse at anytime let out a creaking sound and was tightly secured.

PA! At that moment, a strong and forceful footstep could be heard.

Sherry panicked and frantically turned her eyes from the ceiling to the front. Like water bouncing off rock, Kamijou had leapt off the ground and was already in front Sherry.

Sherry quickly waved the oil pastel.

However, Kamijou's fist was a lot faster, easily hitting Sherry's face.

Sherry's body swayed along with her hair and robes, rolling on the subway track a few meters before finally stopping. After spending so much time to prepare all the traps, they were useless; this caused her to look extremely anxious and nervous.

“…Ugh, damn it!”

Sherry stumbled one to two steps back and cursed to herself. The oil pastel in her hand was trembling slightly as well, the force of her fingers was about to break the oil pastel in half.

“Don’t stop me! I must create the ‘spark’ to this war! Why can’t you tell that this is the most dangerous situation!? Academy City’s security has even been getting loose nowadays, and the Anglican Church allowed that Index to go out of hand! The situation now is like what happened to Ellis! We caused quite a tragedy, and this time, it involves the whole of Academy City and the Anglican Church! I suppose you know what the outcome will be!!”

Sherry’s voice bounced a few times through the dark underground before reaching Kamijou’s ears from all angles.

Her motivation was the death of a friend.

Because of that, Sherry felt that when scientists and magicians got too close, tragedy would be the only result. Forget about disputes and conflicts, sometimes, just the thought of wanting to improve friendship would bring about the opposite effect. In Sherry’s view, for the science side and magic side to not have any further conflicts, the only way was for both to be involved in their own territory, completely isolated from each other, and to chase away everyone from the other camp.

In order to do this, Sherry wanted to create a spark for war.

This was to prevent both sides from trying to understand each other. This was because Sherry knew that the kind way of thinking would only cause the situation to worsen and create tragedies.

Sherry didn’t really want to create a war. As long as she could create a ‘spark’, her objective would be achieved.

Thinking about this, Kamijou sighed with disdain.

“How ridiculous. Can you justify your actions? What did Kazakiri do? What feud does Index have with you? You’re going about proclaiming that you don’t want conflicts, BUT HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE YOU GOING TO KILL?”

Kamijou roared, releasing all of the pent up negative feelings inside him.

As he couldn’t agree with it, he roared,

“YOU WANT TO GET ANGRY, OKAY, NO ONE WILL STOP YOU. BUT YOU’RE TAKING IT OUT ON THE WRONG TARGET!! WHO WILL LEARN FROM THIS!? YOU'RE UNHAPPY, I UNDERSTAND THAT! I BELIEVE I WON’T BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS! BUT IF YOU’RE GOING TO POINT THE FINGER AT ANYONE, YOU’RE GOING TO END UP CREATING THE CONFLICT THAT YOU DON’T WANT TO SEE THE MOST!!”

Ellis’ death could be attributed to the minority group of scientists and magicians who had worked together, and the Anglican Church who had viewed these people as a dangerous group of radicals.

After understanding all this, what were Sherry’s thoughts?

Was she going to take revenge for her friend?

Or was she going to swear that she wouldn’t allow the tragedy to repeat itself.

“…I don’t know.” Sherry Cromwell bit her teeth hard as she said,

"DAMN IT! I REALLY HATE EVERYTHING! I WANT TO KILL EVERYONE WHO KILLED ELLIS! I WANT TO BURY ALL THE SCIENTISTS AND MAGICIANS TOGETHER! NOT ONLY THAT, I DON'T WANT THE MAGICIANS AND ESPERS TO FIGHT EACH OTHER! MY MIND'S BEEN A COMPLETE MESS SINCE THE BEGINNING!!"

This contradicting roar echoed throughout the dark passage.

She seemed to have heard of it herself, and continued on in a self-loathing tone,

"THIS ISN'T MY ONLY BELIEF! EVERYTHING FEELS LOGICAL, THAT'S WHY I'M IN PAIN!! I DON'T JUST LIVE FOR JUST ONE RULE! I CAN'T LIVE LIKE A MECHANICAL PUPPET! YOU WANT TO MOCK ME, FINE GO AHEAD! THE NUMBER OF THINGS I BELIEVE IN ARE AS MANY AS THE STARS, EVEN IF ONE OR TWO ARE GONE, IT WON'T BOTHER ME A SINGLE BIT!!"

However, Kamijou Touma just responded,

"Why haven't you realized it yet?"

"...What?"

"Your words are really contradicting. You believe that your heart is having so many contradictions, that you can accept all sorts of ideas, that your belief will waver...maybe you're thinking that way. But you're wrong. Actually, you had only one belief right from the beginning."

Kamijou said it, the only answer that Sherry herself hadn't thought of, "Anyway, you just don't want to lose your friend, right?"

That was right, the 'beliefs' that Sherry Cromwell had were as many as the stars in the sky, and the contents were contradicting each other. But the basic source was the same. All her beliefs came from what happened to her friend, and all her thoughts had been bred and derived from there.

Even though her beliefs were as many as the stars, the thoughts for her friend hadn't changed a single bit.

"Stand on one side and think carefully! If you can't, then think about it some more! Didn't you use those dirt 'eyes' to spy on us? What do you think? Do Index and I look unhappy together? It’s alright even if we don’t separate from each other completely! Even if we don’t do anything, we can remain happy together forever!”

Wasn’t Kamijou’s and Index’s relationship what Sherry had always wanted? Why must she break such a relationship?’ Kamijou would definitely not say those words, for Sherry had only one wish, and that wish couldn’t be fulfilled anymore. There was no substitute for the wish, and if someone had tried to tell Kamijou to replace his relationship with Index with someone else, Kamijou would definitely sock that guy good.

Thus, Kamijou didn’t mean this.

What Kamijou Touma was trying to say was,

‘We don’t need your help! So stop taking away my important friend!’

Sherry Cromwell’s shoulders jerked.

She knew that her wish couldn’t be fulfilled any more, but she should remember how important that wish was. As it had been taken away, she understood the pain behind it even more.

Sherry’s face distorted due to sadness.

Kamijou’s words were very simple, it was not hard to understand. Though they were rather immature words, they touched Sherry’s heart, for she had let out a similar shout before.

“INTIMUS115—I’LL SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO MY LOST FRIEND!!”

But right now, her angry roar rejected Kamijou’s idea.

She shouted her magic name.

She should be able to understand Kamijou's feelings.

However, Sherry Cromwell had numerous beliefs , and among them were things that she didn't want to understand. No, she did this, perhaps because she could understand Kamijou's thinking. The person right in front of her had everything that she had lost, and obviously, Sherry wanted to personally drag this person down to Hell. For such a belief to exist even among the numerous number of them wasn't strange.

SHUA! She waved the oil pastel in her hand.

Lines appeared on the walls beside Sherry, and the walls collapsed like paper clay. A large amount of dust flew about instantly blocking both people's sight.

Seeing this grey-screen fog like dust heading towards him, Kamijou inadvertently felt like retreating.

But at that moment, Sherry broke past the dusty fog and arrived in front of Kamijou. She grabbed the oil pastel and dashed at Kamijou like a bullet.

Kamijou was shocked. Anything that touched that oil pastel, no matter steel or dirt, everything would be material for Ellis. Maybe even human flesh.

"DIE, ESPER!"

She cursed like a devil and yet looked like a child about to cry.

(Ah, I see.)

In reflex, Kamijou gripped his right hand and thought of something.

Most likely, this wasn't her ultimate attack. If this attack could definitely kill Kamijou, she would have done it right from the beginning. And when Ellis had been held down by Anti-Skill, she hadn't gotten hit by Kamijou so easily, let alone set so many traps in this subway.

Sherry Cromwell's beliefs were as many as the stars in the sky.

She had said that every single one of them sounded logical, thus it was extremely painful.

In other words...

"You hope that someone can stop your belief?"

BAM! Kamijou's fist crushed the soft oil pastel into bits.

The fist didn't slow down a single bit, and even though it slightly deviated, it headed towards Sherry Cromwell's face.

PAM!! Sherry's body slammed onto the floor of the subway, letting out a terrifying sound.

Kamijou slowly walked towards Sherry, who was lying beside a pillar. Seemed like she was unconscious now.

(Well...has Ellis finally stopped?)

Kamijou didn't dare to find out himself. Even if he was to wake Sherry up and question her, it was unlikely that she would tell the truth. Whether her answer was a 'YES' or a 'NO', it wouldn't ease Kamijou's insecurity.

(Damn it! Looks like I have to check it out myself!)

For added security, Kamijou decided to pick up some waste electric cables and tie Sherry's hands and legs up.

After tying Sherry's hands and legs, Kamijou ran down the path.

After running inside for a while, there was a heavy vibration within the darkness.

There was no need to ask where Ellis had gone.

"..."

10 seconds later, Sherry Cromwell slightly opened her eyes.

In truth, she wasn't unconscious.

Sherry was wondering, why hadn't she been killed? Since she knew that she had no right to complain even if she was killed, Sherry had done a frontal attack that was no different from suicide.

Right now, though she was rather contented, she didn't know which belief would appear next, since there were still as many as there were stars. She might break away from these bonds and start hunting down those people again.

As she more or less understood what the boy had meant, she had some thoughts of not wanting to hurt others. But on the other hand, a completely contradictory thought appeared in her mind.

Having her hands tied up behind her, Sherry shook her body to cause the oil pastel to fall out from her clothes.

(Ellis...)

Sherry lied on the floor, using the hand behind her to pick up the oil pastel. At that moment, Sherry thought of something. Right now, Ellis was in automatic mode, and wouldn't accept her orders. In other words, even the most basic order of 'self-destruct' would be ignored. Unless they destroyed the 'secret code' safety mechanism or destroy more than 90% of Ellis' body, Ellis wouldn't be stopped.

Angry and regretful, Sherry waved her last oil pastel.

She couldn't create 2 Ellis at the same time. In other words, as long as the current Ellis wasn't destroyed, Sherry was unable to create a new one. And this meant that for Sherry, who was now tied up, there was no way to escape.

(Ellis...)

Unable to move, Sherry Cromwell gave a meaningless command to Ellis.

Was this order to destroy the target? Or to abort the mission?

These two thoughts appeared in her heart at the same time.

Part 6

The stone golem shook its head.

Index’s Spell Intercept had failed.

The stone golem raised its fist.

The terrifying sound of the flesh being smashed echoed throughout the wasteland.

But it wasn’t Index’s flesh being splattered, and the calico cat was unharmed. Of course, it was not the stone golem breaking either; a monster made from stone wouldn’t make such a sound.

It was Kazakiri Hyouka.

This girl had jumped over Index’s head from behind, sending a flying kick at the abdomen of the stone golem. The power and speed were abnormal, like a meteor strike.

BOOM!! An explosion could be heard.

Like an iron ball sent flying, the stone golem was lifted up into the air and made 3 flips before falling face first down on the ground. This strike alone caused the stone golem to fly back 7 meters. In contrast, after Kazakiri used all her strength to hit the stone golem, she silently stopped in the air.

Like a light feather, she slowly descended to the ground.

PAM!! The heavy vibrations could be felt.

The moment Kazakiri Hyouka let her leg that hadn't been used to kick land, with the leg at center, there were cracks extending out to 2 meters radius. It was as if a large hammer had been used to slam the ground. This gave anyone a wrong impression that Kazakiri was now 10 times heavier.

"Hyou…ka…?"

Index wanted to shout at Kazakiri, whose back was facing her, but on seeing what was going on, she gasped.

The right leg that Kazakiri had used to kick had completely disappeared from the knee and below. That one hit had been able to send a several ton giant stone golem flying far away, and the recoil far exceeded what a normal human could withstand.

At first, that was what Index assumed.

But on seeing the cut side of the right leg, she saw that it was actually a hole there. The wound was like a transparent pillar, with the paint peeled off, it was very unnatural.

(…That…what's going on?)

Index hugged the calico cat and pondered.

The Jumping Zombie Spell (Chiyoushijiyutsu), Necronomicon, The Hand of Glory (Hasodoobugerrowari), Vetala Sorcery (Weetarajiyujiyutsu), the Elixir (Erikushirunado)…in Index's mind, there were numerous spells and knowledge regarding the manipulation of the dead. Some spells only required a bit of touch-up on the corpse, and after that, it would be easy to manipulate them freely.

But, even Index couldn’t explain what was in front of her.

Could humans really change into something like this?

PAM! She could hear the sound of a large bed sheet being flapped in mid-air. After that, Kazakiri’s broken leg was now as good as ever. It was like a spring was attached onto her leg, and her new leg seemed to bounce back up from the ground, at a shocking speed.

“Hurry, run.”

Kazakiri Hyouka didn’t turn her head back.

Her back faced Index as she said,

“Hurry up and run…it’s…still dangerous here.”

This voice truly came from the Kazakiri Hyouka that Index was familiar with. Thus, Index was puzzled and didn’t dare to say anything. She couldn’t tell whether she could let her guard down, because she couldn’t tell whether this girl was the real ‘Kazakiri Hyouka’, this one may be a fake that really resembled the real one.

At this moment, the stone golem on the floor made a creaking sound.

The stone golem seemed like it wanted to stand up, but Kazakiri’s hit had caused a lot of damage to its structure. In terms of human anatomy, it was like the waist was immobilized. The stone golem let out a mysterious sound, it was the sound of the joints shaking…

PAM! A sound similar to bones breaking could be heard.

The result of trying to stand up—it caused even more damage to the insides of the body.

CRA CLARCK CRACK CRACK CRACK! The stone golem moaned. Strictly speaking, the golem didn’t have any vocal chords, thus, it was a dissonance of sounds caused by the joints trying to move. The stone statue couldn’t stand up properly, and could only use its limbs to support itself. It looked up, looking like it was about to shout out at the sky.

Suddenly, there was a huge gust of wind.

With the stone golem that was continuing to let out this sudden voice, a tornado-like storm whipped up, and the large chunks of wind seemed to swallow all the rubble. However, this wasn't one that carried everything up into the air and forced them all over the place. In terms of its nature, it was like a whirlpool that was trying to pull in any nearby ships into the abyss of the sea.

The wind wasn't blowing outwards, but inwards.

Pebbles, empty cans, abandoned bicycles, windows without panes…all of them were absorbed onto the stone golem. After that, they got crushed by an invisible force, becoming a part of the stone golem's body.

(Oh no…that hit just now made the stone golem lose control of its regeneration ability…?)

Index tightly hugged onto the calico cat that was about to fly out of her hands, her entire body trembling. The one hit by 'Kazakiri Hyouka' seemed to cause fatal damage to the stone golem, even damaging the 'core' hidden inside the stone golem's body.

But the wound could no longer be repaired.

Thus, the command to 'continue fixing it until the wound heals' would continue to be executed. The parts that were unable to be repaired would just suck up excess stuff. In the end, the stone golem would continue to snowball and get bigger. The body which had originally been close to 4m tall was now 2 times as wide in less than 30 seconds. The posture it took by lifting itself off the ground looked no different from a roof covering Index and Kazakiri.

The neighboring structures started to make noises.

Index heard these huge structures making terrible noises like trees in a storm, her pale skin inadvertently turning paler. If this kept up the surrounding buildings around the duo would be blown apart. Once they were engulfed by this catastrophe, they would have no chances of surviving. Besides, the tornado was at the capacity such that it was able to destroy any buildings. No matter how Index tried to hold on, her feet would still leave the ground and she would be swallowed by the body of the stone golem.

Index knew that they had to get away, and fast.

Right now, that stone golem was in the condition that it didn’t need a controller, thus the Spell Intercept wouldn’t work. Since the stone golem's regeneration system was malfunctioning, and it would continue to run without being able to repair itself, safety pins alone weren’t going to seal its movements. Index didn’t like it, but since she was unable to perform any magic, she was unable to do anything despite the vast amount of knowledge that she had.

Index was unable to restrain the stone golem any more. As far as she knew, the only one who could settle this situation was the boy with the strongest right hand.

“HYOUKA, RUN!!”

Even though Index was unable to confirm that the girl in front of her was the ‘Kazakiri Hyouka’ who had played with her after school, she still shouted at her.

At this moment, the outer wall of destroyed buildings was approaching.

Right now, the giant hammer-like mass of dirt was being affected by the tornado as well, flying about in mid-air. Index hurriedly hugged the calico cat and squatted down. The pile of dirt passed above Index’s head , colliding on the asphalt road. The fragments pulled from the road were also being absorbed into the stone golem.

Anyone carelessly lifting their head up would be caught by the flying blocks of stones in the air, let alone escaping.

In such a moment of despair, Kazakiri Hyouka still stood around as if it was nothing.

The giant slab of rock that was even larger than Kazakiri’s body brushed her cheeks, but she didn’t even recoil her neck. Like an old man staring at the waves of a sea, she was unmoved by it.

Kazakiri Hyouka didn’t turn her head back, just saying silently.

“You…better run.”

“Then what about you?”

Index held the calico cat down to prevent it being blown away as she asked.

“I…”

The girl pondered for a while, before saying,

“I have to…stop that monster.”

As if it got angered by Kazakiri Hyouka’s voice, the stone golem that was supporting itself on its limbs raised its right arm. Due to the increase in mass, its movements were slower, but like an avalanche that was about to collapse, the stored energy was waiting to be released in an instant.

Once the punch was sent, it would definitely crush the duo and the surrounding buildings to dust. There was no way to defend against that strength that far exceeded a human's.

“No way, Hyouka! Run! That isn’t an enemy that a human can take on! You have to think of some other way even if you want to fight it.”

The stone block didn’t move its fist, seemingly aiming at its target silently.

“Hyouka, that thing isn’t human! Facing that thing head-on isn’t a smart thing to do! You will definitely die! Hyouka!”

Index shouted, and at that moment, Kazakiri slowly turned her head around.

She was supposed to be locked on by this cannon-like fist, yet Kazakiri didn’t look concerned as she turned around.

“…Don’t worry.”

Kazakiri said.

She looked like she was going to cry anytime, yet she revealed a smile.

“Because I’m not human as well.”

Index couldn’t help but gasp.

Kazakiri Hyouka stared at Index’s expression, barely able to force a smile out, and said a last sentence.

“I’m sorry, for tricking you for so long.”

The stone golem behind Kazakiri sent its fist over.

BOOM! The air got compressed, and it was not much different from a meteorite falling. Index couldn’t help but cringe, still shouting Hyouka’s name.

Kazakiri Hyouka didn’t reply.

She turned around to face the stone golem, raising her slender arms to each side, using herself as a shield to protect Index.

The fist of the stone golem was right in front of her.

This huge hit wasn’t like a bullet or a cannon, but an entire wall slamming over. The difference in strength between Kazakiri and the stone golem was astounding.

It was like using a twig to block a mudslide.

BOOM!

Kazakiri Hyouka's slender arms blocked the fist of that stone golem called Ellis front straight up front.

Her hands, legs, chest, abdomen, back, head…all of the body parts were injured severely, her entire body was in pain as she looked like her limbs were going to break apart. Her arms were shorter by at least 5cm, and the compression of the arms caused Kazakiri's originally slender arms to wrinkle. It was like there were protrusions under her skin.

"Ah…ah…"

Kazakiri Hyouka could hear the sound of the girl behind her, who was unable to say anything.

Kazakiri wanted to tell her not to worry, but she couldn't even turn back and smile.

She couldn't say anything, nor do anything.

Her body let out some cracking sounds, and a sharp pain spread from inside her hands to her arms, as if a nail file was used to rub against teeth.

Like a landslide, the power that could make anyone despair exerted itself on Kazakiri's body. The power of the stone golem's fist was absorbed by Kazakiri, breaking her fingers. She supported herself off the ground as she was pushed backwards on the asphalt road. The calves that were holding up against an unfathomable amount of pressure let out a terrifying sound, like branches of a tree about to be broken from the weight of snow on them. The sudden sensation of pain echoed through Kazakiri's body, her calves felt like someone had been using a hammer to hit them.

The stone golem seemed like it wanted to thoroughly destroy this little resistance in front of it, as it increased the force.

"AH..AAAHHHHHHH!!!"

Kazakiri shouted as she exerted more strength, her limbs expanding rapidly. This wasn't a phenomenon caused by exerting the strength in the muscles, but more like a balloon, as the limbs that were being pressed down expanded, again

reverting back to their original shape.

Kazakiri's vision was becoming blurry, as if a wound that was almost healed was being ripped open again.

The stone monster again exerted more strength with its fist.

The external force that was trying to crush the flesh and the internal force that was trying to let the flesh regain its shape collided with each other, and the girl's body was stuck between these two forces, making creaking sounds like they were dragging on an old wooden floor.

Kazakiri gritted her teeth, not willing to let her hands separate from the stone golem's fist.

She definitely couldn't let go.

She had to protect the girl behind her. That white girl wasn't a monster like her, she didn't have the strength to block the giant fist.

A monster, had to be stopped by another monster.

(But…)

However, no matter how much she tried, Kazakiri Hyouka wouldn't get any redemption.

Even if she saved Index, the price would be that Kazakiri Hyouka would be defeated by the stone golem. She didn't have enough experience to know whether her severely damaged body could recover. Besides, if her body was like the pillars or bicycles, Kazakiri's body would become a part of the stone golem. It was hard to imagine what Kazakiri Hyouka would become. And even if a miracle occurred, and both of them survived, Index already knew that Kazakiri wasn't a human.

(But…)

During that time when they had first met in the cafeteria,

During that time when they had spent together in the underground street,

It would never come back again.

(But, I can’t just do nothing…!!)

Kazakiri exerted all her strength and stood firm. Her hands, legs, waist, back… every single part was being squashed and expanding over and over again. Her body that was being abused let out a scary sound that was like fingernails scratching a blackboard, echoing again and again.

“Uuu…AHHHHHH…!!”

The white nun behind her let out a voice of shock.

“MEOW! MEEOOWW!!”

And even the calico cat was letting out a terrified voice.

To Index and the calico cat, what did Kazakiri Hyouka look like? Kazakiri inadvertently bit her teeth tight. The Kazakiri Hyouka that had walked beside them so naturally, what was she like now?

But, it seemed that Kazakiri didn't mind some wounds ripping apart as she exerted even more strength.

Because they were friends.

Even though the white nun may not treat Kazakiri as a friend after this, to Kazakiri Hyouka, she still hoped that the white girl would continue to be her friend, until the very end.

A sound echoed throughout.

The stone golem again let out another sound.

Under the strong sensation of the pain of the body being ripped, Kazakiri Hyouka saw it. The impatient stone golem raised its other arm.

But Kazakiri’s hands were both blocking the stone golem’s right fist.

(Ugh…!)

Kazakiri gritted her teeth. At this point, even if she had to sacrifice her body, she had to buy time for that girl to escape. Kazakiri made her final determination.

The stone golem's other fist was raised in mid-air, as if it was aiming at its target.

One more second before she would be destroyed. Kazakiri inadvertently closed her eyes.

"Kaza…KAZAKIRI…!"

The familiar voice of a teenager called out.

The voice came from behind. And with this roar, she could hear the sound of footsteps dashing at full speed. With the current situation, Kazakiri couldn't look back. But even if she didn't look back, she could understand what expression the boy would show, what he was thinking, and how fast he was running in her direction.

Even though that boy had seen her like this, he still preferred to call her 'Kazakiri'.

Not a monster, but Kazakiri.

While Kazakiri Hyouka was still stunned, the boy's black shadow immediately dashed past her with a javelin-like speed.

At the same time, the stone golem swung its other fist over.

The boy had no doubts, no hesitation, no fear. He only had one trump card. He gripped his right fist as hard as a rock.

BAM! The two fists collided with each other.

Blood flowed out of the boy's fist.

But that wasn't because of the strength of the stone golem, but because the boy had used all his strength to hit the hard and rough surface of the rock. The cannon-like hit of the stone golem had lost all its power the moment it had touched the boy's fist. No, more accurately, it was the moment when the boy's

fist had touched the transparent membrane which surrounded the stone golem's fist like a magnetic field.

The mountain-like force pressing down on Kazakiri instantly vanished.

At the same time, the large and fat stone golem started to crumble. After that, the golem broke up into pieces, completely falling apart. Right now, due to the gray dust that was even thicker than it had been in the underground street, everyone's vision was blocked.

(It's over…)

In the world where the visibility was blocked by the gray screen, Kazakiri Hyouka smiled to herself, alone.

(The harmonious…illusion at present is over…)

With a sound like a rubber bullet bouncing off, Kazakiri's limbs rapidly expanded, regaining their original shape.

With a lonely smile, she decided to disappear before the dust settled.

The danger was over.

Thus, nobody needed Kazakiri Hyouka. She was like a nuclear weapon after a war ended. With such great power, in a peaceful world, even if she didn't do anything, she would terrify others. And that white girl that Kazakiri had wanted to protect shouldn't reveal a fearful look.

Good thing their vision was blocked, Kazakiri thought.

And right now, Kazakiri didn't have the courage to look back at Index's expression.

Part 7

Kamijou was standing at a corner of the ruins.

The moment the dust scattered, Kazakiri Hyouka was gone. However, despite there not being any rain, there were 2 or 3 drops of water on the ground.

Mikoto and Shirai had heard the commotion and immediately rushed over. They said that Anti-Skill and Judgment members would arrive soon, and it was best to run away before things got sticky.

Thus, Mikoto and Shirai grabbed Index, who wanted to stay there with Kamijou, and used her teleportation to get away. Shirai's Teleport seemed to have some sort of limit in terms of distance, so they should probably be a distance of about 100m. Due to the ability of Kamijou's right hand, he could only run away on his own.

As for Sherry, Anti-Skill would most likely take care of her. Seeing past cases, Sherry's name wouldn't even appear in the paper.

"AH…so troublesome."

Kamijou sighed. Before the Anti-Skill and Judgment members arrived, he had something that he must finish. He looked up and seemed to confirm something before walking up to one of the abandoned buildings.

The windows and interior decorations had all been removed from the buildings, and the gray concrete was exposed. There were phrases and directions written all over the walls and floor with red chalk. Maybe they were meant for demolishing procedures. The red sunset passed through the windows that didn't have any glass in them, piercing through the dusty space like a laser.

Kamijou headed up the stairs that had the rails removed.

Up, up, up, up, up, all the way to the highest level.

The door leading to the roof was also removed.

He walked onto the roof that was dyed red by the sunset. The place seemed like it used to be a garden. The soil in the flowerbed had dried up and blown away, the plants had already withered and died, and their remains that had become tea colored were swaying in the air.

And in a corner of this ex-wonderland that was now like a graveyard, Kazakiri Hyouka was sitting on a chair, her back leaning on the metal handle that was meant to prevent falling. Her head was lowered, so one couldn't see her expression.

Her limbs that had been crushed were now restored, and it looked like she didn't have any visible wounds on her.

But she didn't even say a word, just silently lowering her head.

Kamijou narrowed his eyes.

If Kazakiri Hyouka's aim was to get away from Index, or rather, to get away from 'humans', she could only go here. In order to get away from Index, yet unable to go anywhere, she could only stay in the ruins.

The lonely girl saw Kamijou on the roof, yet still didn't say anything.

Only the sounds of water dropping could be heard between them.

Kazakiri, who had lowered her head, held a large billboard with both hands. The transparent water droplets continued to drip on it.

"Because…I was so happy…"

Kazakiri seemed to notice Kamijou's look as she finally looked up, and gently smiled.

"Because…I used all my strength…to protect important friends. Not anyone else, but me…so…I'm very happy. I'm so happy, thus I cried…really…"

"…"

"Why…why must you show that expression? Please…smile, praise me a bit… also, if possible, be a bit jealous of me, so that it can be perfect…I…I took away your role of being the knight…ahhaha, what am I saying…"

Kazakiri Hyouka smiled, but Kamijou Touma didn't.

He couldn't smile.

Facing this sad expression, how could he smile?

“Uu…”

Kazakiri bit her lips, and the smile gradually vanished.

“I knew this…right from the beginning.”

Kazakiri muttered,

“…It’s a natural thing…everyone can guess it…a monster like me revealing my identity…anyone can guess the outcome…if I had continue to hide it, maybe it wouldn’t have been discovered…but I foolishly revealed the truth…but I don’t want…I don’t want to let others see me like this…”

Saying all of this, Kazakiri couldn’t continue.

Her throat continued to let out a choking voice.

“…But I had no choice.”

She tried her best to move her trembling lips, and said the words.

“In order to save…the first person who ever treated me as a friend…I had no choice…”

She must have made this realization right from the beginning.

As a monster, once the truth was revealed, she would lose her most precious thing. Because this worst-case prediction clearly appeared in her mind, Kazakiri hoped with all her heart.

Hoping that this prediction would not come true..

She wouldn’t think of how low that probability was, but would desire a miracle from God.

But the result was—

“Why…must I lose it…”

She slowly and shakily moved her back from the railing, and stood up.

“Why…must I make others frightened?”

She let out tears and buried her face into Kamijou’s chest.

The sorrow hidden beneath the smile was all released from close range.

“I…I…I just can’t stand seeing my friend getting hurt, so I stepped forward… because I have strength, I can protect those important…so I couldn’t leave it as it was…that's just…THAT’S JUST HOW IT IS!”

The girl’s slender and delicate hands were beating on Kamijou’s chest.

The obscure voice continued to come from the face that was buried in the chest.

“I’M SO SAD…SO UNSATISFIED …IT HURTS SO MUCH…! WHY MUST IT END UP LIKE THIS…! DID I…DO SOMETHING WRONG? I WANTED TO PROTECT OTHERS…AM I WRONG IN THINKING THAT WAY?”

The torn and heartbroken voice pierced Kamijou’s eardrums.

She knew that it was useless, but she couldn’t control herself, and shouted.

“I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE TOGETHER! WANTED…TO BE FRIENDS FOREVER! I THOUGHT…WE’LL BE BEST FRIENDS! WHY…DID IT END UP LIKE THIS? WHILE THE PERSON I WANTED TO PROTECT WAS STARING AT ME IN SURPRISE, CAN YOU UNDERSTAND MY FEELINGS? UP TILL NOW…I CAN’T UNDERSTAND IT MYSELF!”

The girl continued to vent her unarranged thoughts.

The pain inside made her unable to maintain her silence.

“CA…CAN’T A MONSTER HAVE A HEART THAT WANTS TO PROTECT OTHERS? IF I WERE A HUMAN…WOULD THIS NOT HAPPEN…? BUT… WHAT COULD I DO? EVEN IF I’M AFRAID, EVEN IF I’M HATED…I CAN’T JUST SIT BY AND DO NOTHING…!”

“…”

Kamijou Touma could only silently listen.

Seeing the girl in front of him tremble and unable to make any sound even while crying, he couldn't even stroke her head.

Because this illusion was too fragile, as it would vanish after just a slight touch.

Imagine Breaker.

The boy that had been given this title couldn't even hug Kazakiri Hyouka.

Thus, he could only say,

"Are you hurt?"

"…Uu…"

"Sad?"

"UUU…!!"

Kazakiri no longer hit Kamijou's chest, just grabbing onto his shirt like a child. She wanted to suppress this choking sound, albeit unsuccessfully as it came out between her tightly sealed lips.

"Since you have these feelings, you're not a monster. Maybe it sounds old, but I can assure you that you're human."

Kamijou paused, and continued,

"Besides, your story isn't over."

"Eh?"

Kazakiri looked up, her face revealed an astonished look.

Footsteps could be heard from behind Kamijou.

So she came, Kamijou thought as he revealed a smile.

Misaka Mikoto had just said that as they were afraid that a certain girl would be

arrested by Anti-Skill or Judgment, they should first take her away. But that girl had insisted on following Kamijou till the end and wouldn’t leave. Kamijou saw all these.

If that girl had already guessed where Kazakiri Hyouka would be hiding,

And that she couldn’t come here immediately because she was forcefully taken away by Mikoto and Shirai,

And until the end, the girl would be worried about Kazakiri…

Index would definitely come here.

“…Eh?”

Kazakiri Hyouka, who had buried her face in Kamijou’s chest, let out an astonished sound once she saw the person appearing behind Kamijou.

Kamijou slowly turned his head around.

At the entrance on the roof that didn’t have a door, stood a girl in a pure white nun's habit. Some of the safety pins on the skirt were gone, and it now looked like a high-cut Chinese dress. The girl continued to pant, her body full of sweat; it was easy to tell that she had run all the way back, not even resting once.

On seeing Kazakiri Hyouka, that girl---Index ran over without any hesitation. No fear, no contempt. It was like a lost child in a theme park finally finding mom.

Kazakiri Hyouka blankly stared, even forgetting to blink.

“Wh…why? Isn’t this…very strange?”

Kazakiri trembled as if her body was cold.

“This…is…so strange…I’m not human…why would she…show this expression to a monster? Why is…she seeing…me like a friend?”

Kamijou Touma casually sighed.

“It’s true that your body is different from ordinary people, you can do things that no ordinary person can do.”

From Kamijou’s tone, it seemed like he was complaining ‘why must you ask such a simple question’?

“But this doesn’t change the fact that ‘you’re her friend’.”

This sentence made Kazakiri Hyouka cry, and her legs weakened as she knelt onto the floor.

Index leapt towards Hyouka, and both of them collapsed on the roof of the building.

Kazakiri staggered and wrapped her arms behind Index, hugging her.

Seeing the two of them, Kamijou chuckled.

Epilogue: On the Other Side of the Stage.

“Doctor, look, I’m not staying in the hospital this time. Ain’t I great? This should be some sort of development, right?”

Inside the doctor’s consultation room, Kamijou delightedly said this to the frog-faced doctor. At that moment, Tsukuyomi Komoe and Himegami Aisa reached their arms out from each side and smacked him on the head.

“Kamijou! You really don’t think anything of causing trouble to others! Causing so much trouble for Anti-Skill…really! I’ll ask you where you went later, so prepare to explain yourself!”

“Didn’t I tell you several times to be careful about this person called ‘Kazakiri Hyouka’? You can’t control yourself whenever you see a woman, looks like we have to thoroughly correct you.”

“…Doctor, those two behind me are really scary. Can you just let me stay in the hospital? Until those two calm down, I need to hide. If possible, send me to the ICU, and don’t allow any visitors.”

The moment Kamijou said this to the frog-faced doctor, the duo behind smacked Kamijou’s head even faster.

Right now, the sun had set, and it was past visiting time. But even though Kamijou was jumping all around, he was still an emergency patient.

After getting involved in a gunfight, and the subway collapse, it was proper procedure to do a thorough check. This instruction was certainly reasonable.

On a side note, Index and Kazakiri were waiting in the waiting room. Shirai Kuroko herself was said to be unable to sleep tonight as she has to clear everything up.

The frog-faced doctor sure looked helpless on seeing that he had to meet a

patient after working hours. He said to Kamijou,

“I really can’t stand you, how can you still smile after this situation? Did too much fatigue cause you to be so hyperactive? Anyway, I must remind you that one more step, your hand would end up with complex fractures."

“…What?”

“You seemed surprised, don’t you? But this is really very likely. The human hand can do many intricate things, but as there are too many joints, it can’t withstand impact. If it’s just a simple attack, a hammer would be a lot safer than a fist.”

On hearing these words, Kamijou remembered that he did feel some pain in his right hand, and shuddered. The doctor’s words were really destructive.

The frog-faced doctor skillfully used a threat to let the patient’s comfort level decrease, and quickly bandaged Kamijou’s hand.

Kamijou remained silent, Komoe-sensei and Himegami weren’t saying anything as well.

After a while, on seeing Kamijou’s bandaged hand, Komoe-sensei slowly said,

“There are many suspicious points about this.”

“Suspicious points?”

“Yes. Though I won’t understand these points even if I say them out loud, it’s uncomfortable for me to keep it to myself, so sensei will point them out.”

Komoe-sensei revealed a smile with deep meaning, raised her index finger, and said,

“First, why would Kazakiri Hyouka ‘appear’ around Kamijou? The entire city’s filled with AIM diffusion field, so logically, she could be anywhere in this city. Why would she appear ‘next to Kamijou’ several times? Of course, this isn’t a coincidence.”

After that, Komoe-sensei raised her middle finger.

“Second, Himegami said that ‘Kazakiri Hyouka is the key to the ‘Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution’, what does this mean? However, since these words were said by the teachers at Kirigaoka Girls' Academy, maybe they're just a baseless rumor.”

After that, she raised her ring finger.

“Lastly, the third point. Why was the terrorist able to accurately find Kazakiri Hyouka’s location when she just ‘appeared’ only for today? Even for us in Academy City, we didn’t even sense Kazakiri Hyouka’s presence, so this information may be leaked from the administrators of Academy City. Of course, this may be just a coincidence, and maybe related.”

Finally, Komoe-sensei opened her five fingers wide, placing her two palms together, and said,

“However, why did so many coincidences occur at the same time? Maybe this is the most suspicious point.”

The entire consultation room was silent.

There was too little information for them to derive an answer.

At that moment, the frog-faced doctor turned away and looked outside the window.

Though one couldn’t see it from the hospital, far away in that direction, there was a windowless building.

“Are you happy now?”

Inside a certain room of that building that didn’t have any doors, windows, corridors, stairs and air ducts, Tsuchimikado Motoharu looked away from the image that was floating in mid-air as he said viciously.

Aleister, who was floating upside-down inside the giant glass cylinder, revealed a slight smile and didn’t answer,

Tsuchimikado seemed like he couldn’t endure the silence, and said,

“Using people as chess pieces, getting the key to the Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution, and you just completed one more part of your plan. Really, to me, you’re the real monster.”

Imaginary Number District - Five Elements Institution.

“Nobody could guess that it was just the AIM diffusion field. Nobody knows that the natural energy scattered by the 2.3 million students in Academy City is the Imaginary Number District.”

As long as power users existed in the city, there would be an AIM diffusion field, and thus there would be a Five Elements Institution.

No one even knew whether the Five Elements Institution was harmful or not.

It wasn’t a large energy corporation that produced energy like nuclear power. If a strong force appeared in Academy City, anyone could feel that something was not right. The truth of the Five Elements Institution, or the AIM diffusion field, was a tiny energy that can only be felt through machines.

However, the Five Elements Institution was as unstable as water at 0 degrees Celsius and in vacuum state.

Under vacuum state, when the pressure’s really low, as the freezing point drops, water won’t freeze even when it’s 0 degrees Celsius. However, by using something like a stick to stir it, the vacuum state water would freeze.

It was the same with the Five Elements Institution. Normally, this little energy could only be detected by a machine, but by giving a certain amount of impact, the power would increase. In this incident, Kazakiri Hyouka’s power greatly increased later on, because of the ‘impact’. It was unknown though whether this ‘impact’ came from the stone golem’s attack, or if there was another catch to it.

But now, the question was – how big was this ‘certain level of impact’? Nobody knew. Maybe one could just stretch a finger and snap it to cause a huge explosion, or maybe one didn’t need to mind about it.

Besides, ‘the power would instantly increase’ was just a ‘predicted’ outcome. What kind of power, how large the scale, no one knew. Maybe it might end up with Academy City disappearing from the world map, or maybe it was nothing

at all.

The specifics couldn't be defined, the results couldn't be judged. Thus, Academy City wouldn't so easily try to remove the Five Elements Institution.

If so, why wouldn't they just control it instead of erasing it?

And the key among this was—

"Kazakiri Hyouka? You actually let a part of the Imaginary Number District materialize by letting it be self-aware as a human? That's crazy."

A boy had a right hand called the Imagine Breaker.

This right hand was the only threat to the Imaginary Number District.

As it felt the threat, it started to be self-aware.

Appetite, sleep; the basic desires that were naturally derived from human functions were all signals about 'wanting to live' and 'I don't want to die'. In other words, things that didn't know life and death wouldn't develop personalities or self-awareness right from the start.

Looking at it another way,

If one used the Imagine Breaker to instill a concept of 'death', one could cause an illusion that didn't have self-awareness to be self-aware.

Aleister, who had been silent up till now, finally said,

"This is a tactic to help control the Imaginary Number District even more easily. Instead of letting it be in a selfless state of 'not knowing what to do', I guess I should let it be able to think, make it easier to predict some of the actions, and even use it for negotiations or coercion."

"If you're creating someone who's friendly to you that you can predict, there's no problem. But how would you be able to handle this if it's a villain that no one can imagine?"

"Villains are easier to control than good people. The difference between these

two is only in the method used to handle them.”

Tsuchimikado cursed. It was true that Aleister viewed humans differently from normal humans.

“Is there really any meaning to doing all this just to get to that Imaginary Number District?”

Tsuchimikado couldn’t help but ask,

“That’s right, the Imaginary Number District is a huge threat to Academy City. However, the threat doesn’t just exist on the inside. You may have done this today, and it would slowly cause this world to lose it's stability. Without knowing why, a legitimate member of the Anglican Church got beaten by Anti-Skill, so St. George Cathedral won’t just keep quiet about it. Are you thinking that you can use this city to beat all the magicians in the world?”

Hearing Tsuchimikado’s threatening voice, the blank expression on Aleister’s face remained unchanged.

“By getting hold of that, magicians aren’t something to be worth fearing.”

“What did you say?”

On hearing these words from Aleister, Tsuchimikado couldn’t help but frown.

The Imaginary Number District, the Five Element Institution, these things weren’t going to assure anyone that it was safe in this city, it was just for the internal affairs of Academy City. The AIM diffusion field only formed around power users.

Thinking about this, Tsuchimikado suddenly had a bad premonition creep up his back.

(Hold on…)

He again tried to summarize the collection of AIM diffusion field, which was all the features of the Imaginary Number District-Five Element Institution.

This thing was like an infrared or high frequency sound, even though it existed,

it couldn’t be seen or heard.

It was something that existed on a different plane from humans, using a certain force that had gathered to form a new type of life.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was rather clear about this.

What this thing would be called in magic terms.

(Don’t tell me…an angel?)

No, the residents of the Imaginary Number District—like Kazakiri Hyouka, were ‘angels’. And the ‘city’ that she was staying in was…

“Aleister…are you thinking of creating an artificial Heaven?”

“What do you say?”

Aleister just coldly gave him this response.

"An artificial Heaven…no, if it’s created only with the power of science, it can’t be called terms like ‘Heaven’ or ‘demon realm’. This is a new ‘world’, not existing in the classics like Kabala, Buddhism, Christianity, Shintoism or Hinduism."

And once this new ‘world’ was created, it meant all of magic would be erased.

For example, assuming that the buoyancy and lift values of the world were drastically increased.

In this situation, according to the picture that a kindergarten child draws, the plane would never fly, but even by following an expert’s design to create a plane, one couldn’t fly as well. However in reality, the plane would still glide on the runway as it tried to fly. What would happen though was that the plane would instantly lose balance once it left the ground, and crash.

Once the new ‘world’ appeared, the magic environment would drastically change, and it would have a similar meaning. Once a magician tried to use magic, the body would explode. The temples and churches that were supported by magic would lose the support, and collapse.

The same phenomenon would occur to any religion.

Thinking closely, one would know that any religion had a certain set of ‘rules’. Of course, there wasn’t just one. Buddhism has Buddhist laws, Christianity has Christian laws. These laws are like all sorts of colors that are newly drawn on this large picture called the world.

All the religions have only one common point, and that’s a certain set of laws.

So what would happen if a new ‘world’ was inserted where the law exists? The law and order that was originally there would be jumbled up. The magicians would explode and kill themselves no matter what kind of magic they used.

No matter how good a violinist was, he couldn’t use a violin with messed-up strings to play. It was the same with the messed-up laws.

Right now, the key to the Imaginary Number District wasn’t complete yet. Once finished, no magician would be able to use magic in Academy City.

And Academy City itself was a miniature version of the world.

Once the power development reached a global scale, all humans would be able to use powers, and the entire world would be engulfed under the AIM diffusion field. The Imaginary Number District that only existed within Academy City would spread to the entire world.

No.

The preparations were already complete.

The working power users Sisters that Kamijou had saved, totaling about 10,000 people, were now scattered all over the world to all the agencies that were co-operating with Academy City. Why must they be patched up ‘outside’? This puzzled Tsuchimikado, and now here was the answer.

That ridiculous experiment that Accelerator underwent wasn’t really some Level 6 evolution, but to scatter the cloned power users all over the world. In order to allow these Sisters to be deported ‘outside’, they came up with the destruction plan of power users, and then abolished this Level 6 project. Using these 2 fake actions, they deported the Sisters all over the world.

This tactic should be considered a success, as right now, all the churches and forces, including the Anglican Church, had not detected the real reason why the Sisters had been deported ‘outside’. No, even if they did, they won’t understand the seriousness of it. At most they would think that Academy City was trying to clean up the mess of its internal problems.

These power users were like an antenna of the Imaginary Number District, covering the entire world.

After that, as long as they could get hold of this incomplete Imaginary Number District and let the new ‘world’ activate.

All the magicians would lose control of their powers and self-destruct due to the new ‘world’.

But to power users, the AIM diffusion field wasn’t harmful at all.

If so, the results of the war between the magic side and the science side would be very obvious. No, that couldn’t be considered a war. It was like blasting out the brains of an enemy who had surrendered.

Thinking about this, Tsuchimikado shook his head.

Was this really Aleister’s final goal? Maybe, maybe not. This person may be smiling and thinking that this level of events was just a stepping stone to help him achieve his other goals, but maybe he was not thinking of that either.

It was hard to tell.

This person, Aleister, who looked like a man, and like a woman; an adult, and a child; a Saint, and a convict, had all the possibilities of humanity. Thus, nobody could guess what he was thinking. It was not an exaggeration to say that he may be thinking of what the whole of humanity was thinking now.

Tsuchimikado shuddered, but like a defeated dog, he tried to be brave as he said,

“Humph, if the Anglican Church knew about it, they would declare war. Right now, I really pity Sherry Cromwell. From what I see from your huge conspiracy, she isn’t simply playing the role of a villain, but a character that stood up to fight against the evil power in order to protect her own world.”

“Don’t be so paranoid. I’m not intending to fight against the Church. Besides, to create that Artificial Heaven that you thought of, I have to really understand how the real Heaven works. That’s the magic side’s business; it’s not something that I can understand while standing on the science side.”

“Are you treating me as if I was born yesterday? In this world, who understands magic more than you do?”

Tsuchimikado curled his lips as he said,

“The magician, Aleister Crowley…”

During the 20th century, there existed a magician who was hailed as the greatest in history.

Everyone agreed that he was the most outstanding magician in the world, and also the biggest embarrassment to magic.

Nobody else in history had performed an act which insulted the magic world to the extent that he had.

That was to give up that magic power he had developed to start all over again and analyze science and technology.

Why Aleister would give up everything he had when he stood at the pinnacle of the magicians, nobody knew. But this was the biggest insult to the magic world. For the strongest magician in the world to give up magic and go to the science side. What Aleister had done was like being the leader of the magic society, and without any compromise, surrendering to science.

Thus, Aleister Crowley became the enemy of all magicians in the world. The people who were trying to kill him weren’t just the Anglicans, who specialized in hunting down witches, but also people who were even the least involved with magic.

Stiyl and Aleister had met before, but Stiyl hadn’t seen through to Aleister’s real identity, and there was a reason behind this. While the Anglican Church was hunting down Aleister Crowley, they had been said to be gathering information about him for a long time. However, the information was just false information that Aleister himself leaked. Since the original information was wrong, no matter

whether one used magical or scientific means to track down Aleister, they couldn’t possibly find any connections to the real Aleister Crowley. In other words, to the Anglican Church, Aleister just so happened to be a common name, or maybe even a false name.

This level of patience and guts made Tsuchimikado’s jaw drop. Even if he himself could do this, he wouldn’t risk it. Or maybe it just showed the difference in power between Aleister and Tsuchimikado.

“Just treat this as me not going to admit defeat to you, I’m going to give you some advice, Aleister.”

“Hm, I’m all ears.”

“Have you heard of the words ‘hard luck’[3]?”

“It means ‘misfortune’, right?”

“There’s another meaning to this. That’s ‘no matter how many times one meets a hellish fate, the person is lucky enough to overcome it safely’.”

Tsuchimikado chuckled, and continued,

“I don’t understand what’s on your mind. Even if you explain it to me further, I most likely won’t be able to understand. But, once you make use of that Imagine Breaker, I hope you’re prepared. If you’re going to treat him half-heartedly, that right hand will rip your illusion apart.”

After Tsuchimikado said that, the teleporter entered the room as if she timed it perfectly.

After that, Tsuchimikado was taken away by this girl who was shorter than him by 30cm.

In this empty room, the man hanging upside down muttered to himself.

“Hm, the world I believed in had been destroyed a long time ago.”

Index and Kazakiri Hyouka were sitting side by side on the sofa in the hospital

waiting room.

Basically, they didn't allow pets inside the hospital, so the calico cat was guarding the house. The white nun who was normally with the calico cat seemed impatient, not knowing where to put her hands.

Kazakiri carefully said to Index,

"Erm…that…skirt…aren't you going to repair it?"

Index was stunned, so she looked down at her lower body. She had taken off those safety pins in order to fight against the stone golems, and now her skirt was all split apart. Now it looked like a high-cut cheongsam.

"That…looks outrageous…no sense of defensiveness at all, so dangerous…"

"After so many things happened, I didn't really have time to repair it. Hyouka, does it look weird?"

"It…it was…very weird…it was weird right from the beginning…it's even weirder now…"

"It's weirder now?"

Index narrowed her eyes, as if she just heard Kazakiri's true words.

At that moment, something strange happened.

Kazakiri Hyouka revealed a bitter smile with a profound meaning behind it, and suddenly, she started to sway like the fog. It was as if there was an illusion, that if she was not careful, Kazakiri's body would disappear into mid-air.

Index gasped. Kazakiri's outline was starting to sway, but never once did it cuts off.

"Hyo…Hyouka…this…"

"Mm…it's a bit troublesome…"

Kazakiri smiled, and said,

“My body…is like a block of powers concentrated in one, so…no matter how I try, I can only exist in an unstable state. And I can’t remain forever…”

Kazakiri confessed. However, Index thought of another possibility.

Imagine Breaker.

The killer hand that erased all supernatural powers, without caring whether it was good or evil.

“No, it’s not that.”

Kazakiri seemed like she saw through what Index was thinking according to her expression.

“That person’s power…didn’t affect me…if it had, I would have most likely disappeared into thin air. So, this isn’t his fault…”

Kazakiri Hyouka gently said, but her voice was fluctuating sometimes being high, and sometimes low.

“…Don’t worry, I won’t be destroyed that easily…my body has the power of 2.3 million people…my lifespan is numerous times that of yours…”

Kazakiri Hyouka smiled.

Index added on the knowledge in her brain to Kazakiri’s words, thinking that it was alright.

But for some reason, Index still felt a heavy sense of insecurity.

Kazakiri’s outline continued to sway unnaturally, without a single sound. Maybe it was an illusion, but the swaying seemed large, as if fog was scattering.

“Ah…yes…regarding something…I don’t know whether it’s important to you…”

“What?”

“Regarding that person’s power…I’m…not too sure…”

After pausing for a while, Kazakiri Hyouka said this.

Kamijou Touma's right hand couldn't be explained through supernatural powers.

Index was shocked as her entire body froze.

"Wait…hold on, Hyouka, it's not possible, right? That kind of right hand doesn't exist in magic! That strange power doesn't exist in the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires that I have in my head! If that's not an esper power, I can't explain it!"

"Ma…magic? I don't know…what that is…"

Kazakiri smiled,

"However, I can confirm that that's not an esper power…my body is formed through…all the esper powers in Academy City…if that person is an esper, the moment his weak energy enters my body, it would have erased my body in an instant."

Index recalled how the boy had said that his power wasn't derived from inside Academy City. That it wasn't man-made, but an innate ability.

If so, what was that power? Index sunk into deep thought.

Since it was a not magic nor esper power, it was another form of power.

"It's time…for me to go…"

Kazakiri said as she stood up from the sofa.

Everything that was on Index's mind instantly vanished. She quickly looked up, feeling very insecure. She said she was going back, but where? If one was to think of it normally, it basically meant night time, it was time to go home. However, for baseless reasons, Index felt that there was a deeper meaning behind it.

Index's expression was like that of an abandoned child. Kazakiri gently smiled and said to her,

"Don't worry…it's alright. Even when my body vanishes, I'm not dead…I just

can’t be seen, can’t be touched…even if you can’t feel it, I’ll always stay with you…”

Index wondered: why would she say such things right now?

It was as if they wouldn’t see each other again.

Even though there was no proof.

Kazakiri Hyouka didn’t say anything like a farewell.

“HYOUKA!”

Index couldn’t help but shout at Kazakiri, who had turned her back.

Kazakiri slowly turned around.

“Yes?”

“Can…can we go out and play tomorrow?”

Index said with a teary expression.

Kazakiri Hyouka smiled.

She replied,

“Sure.”

Afterword

To the readers who took the huge risk to buy 6 books at one go, nice to meet you.

To the readers who read each book one by one, it's been a while.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

It's the 6th volume already. The protagonist, heroine, antagonist, ending, and the story behind the stage; there's a lot of descriptions here that are slightly different from the previous volumes. As for what changed, I'll like the readers to understand it as they read it.

The key magic term here is 'golem'.

This gimmick is like a slime; it's something that appears often in games, thus it gives a feeling that it isn't glamorous, that it shouldn't be considered a final stage boss. However, in History (or what were seen to have existed), the golems were amazing things. It was said that the magic required to create a golem uses the blueprint of how God created Humanity, and only those who fully understood that Kabbalah can use it.

In other words, it's like the Philosopher Stone, basically meaning that 'one can be considered the strongest if the person can create one'. All the golems have a safety feature on it, and once the caster doesn't need it, the caster can easily turn it back into dirt. This is likely how the self-destruct mechanism of the huge robots came about.

Haimura-san, who's in charge of the illustrations, and Miki-san, who's in charge of the project; I really like to thank you two for not abandoning this Kamachi even when you're busy.

Finally, I'll like to thank the readers who bought these books. It's thanks to everyone that this Kamachi can earn a living.

Then now, let me be secretly happy that you liked this series.

And let me secretly hope that you won't abandon this series.

At this point, let me put my pen down.

-In the end, did the Imagine Breaker protect the girl's illusion?

Notes

1. ↑ lengths of braided rice straw rope used for ritual purification in the Shinto religion
2. ↑ In Ancient Japanese tradition, when there was difficulty in the development of a bridge, embankment or fortification, the people would carry out this ritual of burying people alive in it to appease the gods
3. ↑ the novels gave it as ‘hard luck’ in English

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 06

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